No. 159

Nº 159

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 41e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 12 April 2016

Mardi 12 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 12 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 12 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 11, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? Minister of Natural Resources—Minister of Northern Development and Mines. My apologies.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I once was Minister of Natural Resources. It was a great portfolio and I enjoyed every second in it, but I am obviously delighted to be Minister of Northern Development and Mines right now.

I'm very pleased to continue debate on Bill 181. I'll be sharing my time with the minister responsible for seniors affairs. We're grateful to have an opportunity to carry on the debate that—

Applause.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Yes, indeed. Let's applaud Minister Sergio.

We're very pleased to be able to continue debate on Bill 181, an important piece of legislation, I think. Second reading debate was led off yesterday by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who has worked very, very hard to put together a piece of legislation that will be bringing forward changes to the Municipal Elections Act.

I think, in an overall sense, the goal is to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect, perhaps, how we can better run modern campaigns and elections. The ministry actually reviews the Municipal Elections Act following each municipal election. The goal is to ensure that the act does meet the changing needs of Ontario communities.

I recall part of Minister McMeekin's comments yesterday, that over 3,400 submissions about how the act could be improved were received from the public, from municipal councils and from staff across the province as part of the consultation last year.

The purpose in us bringing forward this legislation now is that we want to do it well in advance of the next municipal elections, in 2018, to allow our municipal partners sufficient time to prepare for the next election cycle in their communities.

I don't think I need to speak to anyone in the Legislature about the important services that are provided by our municipalities. Many people in the Legislature are former members of municipal councils, and certainly all of us work closely with the municipalities we represent to ensure that we are indeed reflecting their views. Certainly my goal as an MPP is to work with the municipal councils I represent: the city of Thunder Bay and many other municipalities in the riding of Thunder Bay–Superior North. One thing that I think we have all come to truly recognize is that municipal governments are the governments that are closest to the people; they are the ones that are going to be hearing directly from their constituents. We, of course, operate on very much the same basis. Certainly we have a very close relationship with our constituents.

The bottom line is that our communities certainly need to be strong. They need to be vibrant places where people can live, work and raise families. That's why I think it is important that we need to ensure that local elections are as efficient as possible. One of the ways I think we can do that—and that's reflected in this legislation—is by increasing transparency and accountability, and allowing more choice in municipal elections. That is very much part of the government's plan to build our province up.

One part of the legislation that is certainly of most interest to municipal leaders—and, I think, to people across the province—is ranked ballots. What we are working on to try to improve, at a time when voter turnout is going down in many communities—that has certainly been the case in municipal elections—is that we think it is timely to look at ideas that could potentially, and we believe will, reverse that trend.

What we are proposing is providing municipalities with an option. The option is to introduce ranked-ballot voting in their communities, if they so choose. I can certainly speak on behalf of those who have spoken to me about ranked ballots. The proponents of ranked ballots certainly believe that this method of voting can make election campaigns more civil; I think that is probably the

case. Jurisdictions that are using ranked ballots have seen better engagement and better debate, and certainly the evidence is that they're seeing higher turnouts. So that is one of the main aspects of it.

There's also a piece of the legislation related to campaign finance. If this legislation is passed—and we're obviously looking forward to a full debate—these changes will certainly help ensure that campaign finance rules are clear, are simple to follow, are easier to enforce and increase transparency and accountability in municipal elections.

What we are proposing, Mr. Speaker, is a framework to regulate third-party advertising to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and more transparent support, including setting contribution and spending limits. I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include whether we ban corporate and union donations, and these changes would give municipalities this option. Again, we want to make sure that our municipalities, our cities and our towns have the opportunity to undertake this conversation with their citizens, and that's very much the goal of this legislation.

We are proposing, for example, that clerks refund nomination fees to candidates only if they file their financial statements by the deadline. This way, candidates would be more than encouraged to file on time. There's an issue related to municipal elections, which we all speak about frequently, in terms of the actual campaign period. Right now, Ontario has the longest nomination period of any province. It probably is not a stretch to say that it contributes to campaign fatigue among candidates and voters. If this legislation is passed, candidates would be able to register between May 1 and the fourth Friday in July instead of from January 1 to the second Friday in September in the year of the election. We think that is a way we could actually reduce the impact of campaign fatigue—change the way that things are set up now, in terms of the election period that is in place.

There is also a goal to make sure we make elections more accessible for everyone. Our proposed changes would certainly require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities. We would be asking for the municipalities to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day.

0910

I'll be passing it off to my colleague shortly, but I want to also make a few more comments about the voters list itself. We are also proposing improvements to the voters list. We need to make it easier for voters to add their name to the list or make changes to their information, as well as to make it easier for clerks to remove the names of deceased voters or deceased electors from the list.

This is very much a reflection of a very significant consultation that was undertaken by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. As I referenced earlier, Minister McMeekin informed us that there had been over 3,400 submissions that came forward in relation to what changes may be put in place. We want to be able to give the municipalities the option to look at the ranked ballot system, one that has been a great discussion among many municipal leaders, and that is certainly the purpose of this legislation. I'm delighted to have had a chance to speak in support of this legislation and will at this point pass it off to my colleague the minister responsible for seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now turn debate over to the minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you. You look good in the chair.

It's delightful to have a few minutes to speak on Bill 181, the so-called Municipal Elections Modernization Act. This is the second reading we are doing on this bill. It still has some time to go. Let me say first that I have to congratulate Minister McMeekin, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for spending considerable time on this particular item. He has been consulting with various stakeholders, and I'm very pleased that it's in the House.

I believe citizens at large have been asking for some changes, some improvements to the Municipal Act; in other words, how municipal elections are taking place in our province. I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that we have hundreds of municipalities and cities, and some of the laws vary within some of the existing municipalities as well. I think the changes that have been proposed are welcome. I would like to say at the outset that I will support the recommendations the minister has made. We'll see how far we can get on it, how quickly we can move it.

The proposal is to see that this recommendation will be delivered to the local municipalities to implement if they so wish. It's only an option. They have the option to either implement this recommendation or change it and make further amendments. But I believe it's important, as Minister McMeekin has recommended, that we direct local municipalities to look at changes in how local municipalities conduct elections.

I have to tell you, Speaker, that this is very important. I come from a municipal background, and we always say that we are closer to the people when we deal with day-to-day issues. Who can say no to the people when they say, "This has really impinged on the way I live my life." If it's a sidewalk issue, if it's to make sure that when you open the tap that the water is running, that the lights are on, that the services are there—it's so important. Speaker, I don't have to tell you, I'm sure, that every member in the House receives calls from people not knowing what is municipal, provincial or federal. I have to say that 60% of the calls I get are municipal issues. So this shows how important it is that our people understand what belongs to them locally, federally or provincially. When people come in to our office, we do listen. We're trying to help them as well.

It's so important that we send this direction to the local municipalities for possible changes, because there are areas that need serious improvement. I was pleased to

hear the Minister of Northern Development and Mines addressing some of the issues and the proposed recommendations. One of them that we've been debating for a long time—and there are people who are really passionate about it—is ranked ballots. It's not confusing, but until it's there and it's done, people won't get used to it. It needs some explanation, yes, and it's one of the ways of electing our local politicians. Whether the cities or municipalities go along with this recommendation is another matter, but at least we are saying, "Let's do it more democratically and more transparently. Let's give the people more opportunities." I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that voters, especially at the municipal level, are not so affluent. We see 27%, 30%—very low turnouts in municipal campaigns.

We need to clean up several issues in every election, but especially municipal campaigns. This would perhaps help increase the turnout at the polls. Ranked ballots are one issue, campaign financing is another, increasing transparency and accountability is another, and banning corporate and union donations is another. Filing returns from candidates has been a big issue. It's sometimes very difficult for local clerks to deal with, because candidates—it's not that they're caught in bureaucratic paperwork or whatever it may be, but I think we have to send a clear message that the clerks are responsible for doing that particular work. Then the clerks will have to report as well.

The campaign period has been something that I have always been—let's say politely—not very happy about. Because when January 1 comes and the election is in October or November, it's like the world stops and everybody is thinking about trying to get re-elected from January all the way to October or November. What happens in between? Why such a long period of time for someone to get organized and put up signs or whatever? In other words, work practically stops, and it shouldn't. It doesn't. We always have staff and professional people in the various departments—public works, transportation or whatever—that they look after. But taxpayers feel, "Why do you need from January 1 to November to run the campaign?" This is an area that I believe municipalities will have to address, and I hope they will.

Now, I have a bit more to say, because I spent 18 years at the municipal level. I would say that I know how municipal campaigns are run and what taxpayers expect, and rightly so. One of the important issues at the polls on election day is accessibility: finding polls in the proper location, not 10 blocks away, disenfranchising people.

My time is up, unfortunately, but, as I said, I come from a municipal government; I spent some 18 years there. I hope that some of these recommendations will have some legs, that we go with second reading and let the municipalities decide how they can better improve municipal elections and municipal campaigns. I thank you for the time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me to provide a couple minutes of questions and comments on Bill 181.

I listened to the ministers' speeches this morning. I don't disagree with the way that they're marketing this bill, and I'll tell you why. When I ran for mayor, I waited till the last hour when nominations closed—and I suggest there are many members of this House who may have done the same—which made it about a month-long campaign period. The writ would have been a month, back in the day when I did that.

0920

So when the government talks about the writ, the registration period—and I'm also going to talk about the lame duck period—I think it's interesting to note that they have made the writ a lot longer under this bill, because the writ will now, in this bill, begin in July. The municipal election will be from July to the election date. I suggest that might be problematic for some people who are considering whether to run. I think it might do the reverse: It might deter people from running for office.

Yes, they have decreased the deadline down, from January 1 to May 1, but there's one thing that they've missed, and many municipalities have talked about this. It's the lame duck period. For example, when I was elected mayor, the election date was on November 8. We took office on December 1. It was just a little over three weeks. This now again, like the last election, pushes it out so that municipal staff would basically run the municipality for almost six weeks. For many, many, many councils, that's problematic. I would think that you would want the council to hit the ground running and you would want to have that short period where they could be oriented. There are issues around meetings and whether the meetings are open or not. New councils aren't open until they get sworn in under those same provisions. So I think the government needs to take a second look at the writ period and also the lame duck period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is always a pleasure to rise and share the thoughts of my constituents from Windsor West in the brief two minutes I have on Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act, and to make comments to what the minister responsible for seniors affairs has said.

I think one of the concerns that I have is that we have, I believe, a 65-page bill that was only tabled a few days ago. That hasn't really given opposition members an opportunity to comb over it, see what the bill is all about and then go back to our municipalities and speak to our city councils, our mayors, talk to our constituents and see what they think. I know the government says they've consulted. I believe a year ago, they announced they were going to go out and consult. But it could be history repeating itself.

We look at a budget that they said they consulted on. They have wasted a lot of people's time and efforts during consultations. They didn't wait for the committee to come forward and report on those consultations that they did on the budget. They tabled the budget before the committee even reported. So we have some concerns on this side. I certainly have concerns about how much con-

sultation actually took place. Were they really listening and really taking to heart what the municipalities were saying? Or did they already have this legislation drafted the way they want things to be done and just pretended they were consulting, pretended they were listening to the municipalities?

I have great concern over the legitimacy of this legislation. I look forward to having more time to read through it and to go back to my city council, my mayor and my constituents of Windsor West to ask what they think, because I just don't trust the consultations that the government side does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes on the comments from Minister Sergio and Minister Gravelle. They talked about a lot of specifics that are in the bill. I want to focus a little bit, really, on the consultation piece.

Speaker, this is something that happens every four years. It's not something that nobody is expecting to happen. Almost a year ago, we announced that the consultation process was going to begin. I know for a fact that there were over 3,400 submissions to the minister on what municipalities and people thought about potential revisions to the Municipal Elections Act. We talked to folks at AMO and Good Roads. I know that we met with municipal leaders, and this came up many, many times, Speaker, so it's hard to comprehend that there was no discussion.

I know in my own riding—and in many others—I meet with local councils. This is one of the things I check off on the list when I talk to those folks about the issues of the day and the issues that affect municipalities.

There will be more consultations. It will go through second reading. It will go to committee. There will be lots of input.

To talk about the ranked ballot, municipalities have an option. They have an option if they want to have a referendum. They have to do some statutory things, which will be outlined in regulation, about open houses or public meetings about their vision, if they still want to choose it, if they want to go down that—I suspect probably not a lot of them are going to go the first time around. They're going to wait and see.

Speaker, consultations have happened, and we're going to do more after second reading. So I look forward to getting this bill passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join, in a brief way, the debate this morning on the changes to the Municipal Elections Act.

I agree with my colleague from Leeds–Grenville with regard to the writ period. I was a last-minute subscriber to a municipal election when I ran in 1997. In fact, that afternoon on the deadline—the deadline was in September; September 10, I think it was—I had three people visit my office at the store—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, they didn't call me Yak there—saying "You've got to run. It's time for you to go." I made that decision and then was subsequently elected to the municipal council in Barry's Bay.

But I really want to talk about the ranked balloting part of this piece of legislation. We've had the first-past-the-post system since Confederation. It may not be perfect, but it has worked quite adequately and quite well. But if you're going to change the way that you elect representatives at any level, whether it's federal, provincial or municipal, then I believe that in this legislation there should be the requirement for a municipal referendum so that the people have their say.

This is not something that a council should be able to adopt as the way that they're going to change how people are elected in that community. Nobody's asking for it. In fact, the city of Toronto has withdrawn their request for ranked balloting. So if there's nobody requesting it, the people within a municipality should have the final say in our democracy as to whether you're going to change how people get elected to the positions that they hold. I think that that is absolutely necessary.

In fact, I'll give the government credit here: In 2007, on the issue of preferential voting or mixed member representation, the McGuinty government held a referendum so that the people across Ontario could have their say. Don't make this change without allowing the people to have their say. We live in a democracy. The people get their say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister responsible for seniors for final comments.

Hon. Mario Sergio: For final comments, I definitely agree in some ways with my charming colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The reason the bill is here is to give municipalities that particular opportunity, that option. Of course, we all would like to have this wonderful thing called democracy work. If we give the direction to local municipalities and we give them the option to do it, by all means.

I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that there are many, many problems during a municipal election, during a municipal campaign. One of the major ones—you may think it's not serious—is voters lists. It's huge; it's a big issue. We are saying, "Let's clean it up." Campaigning is an issue. I can go north of Steeles in my area and all the boulevards are full of election signs. It looks like Christmas trees all over the place. But on the south side of Steeles, you're not allowed. So I think there is a lot of cleaning up to do.

Now, I have to thank all the members who participated in the debate this morning. But let me say, Speaker, that something has to be done, and what better way to tell local municipalities to do it, if they so wish?

0930

Now, this is only second reading. I hope that, indeed, we will involve other people and stakeholders in the community to have their say as well. I totally agree with the members who have spoken, that there are issues that need to be addressed. This is one of the reasons why we

are debating the bill. We all have our own experience locally. There are a lot of areas where improvements must be made so that we can improve the accountability and transparency when a local municipal election takes place—in every election, but as I said, local elections are the closest ones. Let's pay more attention to them.

I thank you, Speaker, and I thank all the members for their contributions.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand today to lend my voice to the debate on Bill 181.

Before I do so, I'd like to go back and update my record from March 24. That was during a debate that we had with regard to the private member's initiative from the member from Ottawa–Orléans. Her private member's bill received unanimous support to recognize the first two ladies who were ever elected into the Ontario Legislature, Agnes Macphail and Mrs. Luckock.

During the debate, I mentioned that I grew up with a municipal office in my home until I was a teenager. I remember everything very well, every nuance that's involved in a person being a clerk-treasurer and ultimately administrator for a local municipality. I was very proud that day to share that my mother, Winona Thompson, was either the first or second woman ever to be named clerk to a municipal township in Huron county. I was hesitant; I said "first or second." I shot mom an email very quickly, and she got back to me right after the debate. I just wanted to make sure, because this is something that we need to celebrate. The first clerk ever named in the county of Huron, specifically for the township of West Wawanosh, was a dear family friend, Joan Armstrong. Mom was the second clerk that was named in Huron county, to the township of East Wawanosh.

It's really nice to have a chance to celebrate this type of leadership and mentorship, because back home in Huron county the retired clerks have a club where they get together for lunch once a month. I'm sure they'll be talking about this. They welcome people to their club on a regular basis. But there's a lot of camaraderie and a lot of pride that goes along with working and serving the people of local municipalities. One thing, one thread that ties all of those people together, past and present, is the serving of the public and making sure democracy is upheld.

This is where I pull my link back into the debate for Bill 181, because democracy has to be upheld, and people really, truly need to have their say. In that regard, I'd like to reflect on a comment that I just heard this past Saturday night. It was a comment that came from the CAO of the township of Morris-Turnberry. She's very concerned, Speaker, and I will share that concern in a second.

But when the member from Leeds–Grenville, during his two-minute hit on the government debate, referenced the concern over the extended lameduck period, I couldn't help but transition that lame duck concept over to this government, because what I heard from the CAO of Morris-Turnberry is that they're very concerned about this lame duck government because they're holding municipalities hostage to their lack of follow-through.

Education rates, education levies have yet to be set by this government, and it's holding up municipalities from finalizing their budgets. Honestly, if it's not one thing, like further downloading or decreased upfunding, now they're holding them hostage to their lack of performance. Speaker, this government needs to pull up its socks and do right by people who are striving and who pride themselves on working so well for their local municipal taxpayers. But again we find another example: This government has yet to set the education levy for this year, and it's holding municipalities back from setting their budgets. Time and time again, a lack of performance and lack of prioritization is causing people in Ontario to be frustrated and not able to fulfill their responsibilities.

As we go back to take a look specifically at Bill 181, there's no greater responsibility than that of our democratic right of electing people. We feel very strongly that the changes this government is suggesting to the Municipal Elections Act, the Assessment Act and the Education Act with respect to third-party advertising, campaign financing, compliance and enforcement, accessibility, the election calendar, voters list, eligibility to vote and run in municipal elections, election administration, as well as ranked ballots, is a little heavy-handed. It's taking us backward, especially when they're proposing all of these changes without an opportunity for people to have their voice, to exercise their right through a referendum, for instance.

We have to take time on our side as the loyal opposition to make sure municipal voices are heard, in order to ensure this bill accurately reflects what they need to run modern, successful, democratic and effective municipal elections.

I'd like to start by echoing what my colleague from Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, stated yesterday. There are some beneficial aspects to this bill. We, however, are concerned with key components that have the potential to ignore fundamental aspects of the democratic process.

For instance, the electoral process is an important and intrinsic part of any democratic society. As such, whenever changes are proposed to that process, our party firmly believes that serious and substantive consultation should be conducted. I have said that on numerous occasions about numerous issues that have been perpetuated by this government. Most important to consultation on this particular issue is the need to allow the public a forum in which they can voice their opinion on that matter. I'll touch a little bit more in detail later on that issue in my debate, because this Liberal government—which ran on a platform, ironically, of open and transparent governance—has been failing the people of Ontario in this respect. Bill 181 is just another long list, as I've alluded to.

There are three key issues we—and I, specifically, during my time—would like to address: the abolishment of the leave of absence exemption for volunteer fire-

fighters who choose to run for municipal office; the continued practice by this Liberal government to leave the working-out of critical details to regulation—and seriously, any time a government chooses to put the meat on the bones behind closed doors, it should cause everyone reason for concern—and thirdly, the concerning lack of public consultation that this bill allows for.

We just heard from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that people deserve to have their say, and I totally agree with that. I'd also like to get on record, for the people watching this debate at home, what exactly this government is trying to propose with regard to a ranked ballot system. I know our esteemed colleague from Oxford highlighted how the system worked yesterday, but it's a complicated method of voting. If we're going to have any sort of informed debate, we must ensure that everyone understands how that works. So I'm just going to go over that again this morning.

In a ranked balloting system, a candidate is required to get 50% of the vote plus one. When you receive your ballot on election day, the candidates will be listed on it in no particular order. As the voter, you then number them as 1 for your most preferred candidate, 2 for your second preferred candidate, 3 for your third and so on, down to your least preferred candidate.

After the polls close, the number of times each candidate was selected as first choice is tallied up. The candidate with the least number of first-place votes is eliminated. The eliminated candidate's votes are then redistributed to the second-place choices on all of the ballots where the eliminated candidate was ranked first. This means that on a ballot where the first-choice candidate was eliminated, the second-choice candidate becomes the preferred candidate. The ballots are recounted and the process continues until a candidate receives the required number of votes to win.

Again, as a kid, I remember the great effort and pride that went into pulling together the voters list and making sure they were distributed throughout the community and throughout the township at the community hub, so to speak, so that everyone could ensure their name was indeed on the voters list. Because back in that day, people knew it was a privilege and an honour to vote, to cast their opinion as to who they wanted to see in their municipal leadership, their municipal council. I hope with all my heart that that privilege and that honour is sustained as we look to a voter turnout—be it municipally, provincially or federally—that seems to be dwindling throughout the years.

0940

Looking at my riding of Huron–Bruce, I'm very proud that, in 2011, Huron–Bruce had the greatest voter turnout in the provincial election and, in 2014, it had the second-highest voter turnout in that particular provincial election. I just want to applaud the good folks from Huron–Bruce at this time for their efforts to get out and exercise their voice and vote, and I want to encourage them to continue to do so.

It gets a little grey when this government starts introducing the concept of a ranked ballot system. It very well could be confusing to some and turn them off, and we don't want to do that. As was pointed out yesterday, we want to ensure that people embrace this new approach to electing a municipal council. While it appears that this government may have conducted some consultation to implement a ranked ballot system, it appears that there has been a lack of consultation on what system, specifically, would be preferred.

I'm not sure about the rest of the MPPs in the House today, but I know the realities, in my home municipality of South Bruce and across the riding—and, I would dare say, there's probably a theme throughout Ontario—are that we can't make it more difficult for individuals to throw their hat in the ring to run for municipal council. We can't make it more difficult to encourage people to come out and vote. In many instances in our wards, people are being acclaimed and, to me, that's a little bit of a worry, because, given the direction this province is currently heading under this government, I would hope more and more people would want to be engaged, would want to embrace the opportunity to try and make a difference and to correct the path that we're on. Again, we're finding there's a trend where acclamations are probably more the norm than not. We don't want to confuse and make things more difficult.

We'll talk about that, that the example—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: You need to get out more, Lou.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: —yes, exactly—of how this particular bill addresses the interests of a volunteer firefighter to throw their hat into the ring is a perfect example of how they're making it more difficult.

The Toronto Star had an article written by David Rider back in May 2015. It's interesting: The conclusion to all of that, after I read that article, is that there's nothing impartial about dictating which electoral system is best for the people without consulting them.

I mentioned volunteer firefighters and I want to jump into that in a little bit more detail. A few months ago, one concern we had in the PC Party was the impact on first responders. Under this bill, the leave-of-absence exemption for volunteer firefighters will be removed. This means that if someone in this capacity wants to run for office, they would be unable to serve in their community for a minimum of 13 weeks.

Again, this just shows the absolute disconnect this government has with the realities of rural Ontario. Our fire departments, thankfully, in all the communities in my riding, are supported by a wonderful team of volunteer firefighters. They have their families to care for, they have their daily jobs that they go to, but, honestly, that team of volunteer firefighters is finite. If somebody would like to throw their hat in the ring for consideration for municipal council, to have them leave that volunteer fire department for 13 weeks will leave a hole in our volunteer teams. That's a concern. It's something that was probably completely overlooked by this government when they rushed the legislation and their consultations in that regard.

I know that in the riding of Huron–Bruce, many of our fire stations, as I mentioned, are comprised of volunteers: The Central Huron Fire Department relies on 20 volunteer firefighters; the Blyth and District Fire Department consists of 22 volunteer firefighters; the Ripley-Huron Fire Department is staffed by 10 volunteers; the Lucknow and District Fire Department is served by 24 volunteers; the Walkerton Fire Department relies on 29 volunteer firefighters; and the Teeswater fire department is comprised of a great team of 22 individuals who are proud to call Teeswater home. But again, they're on rotating teams. Thinking that they might like to make a difference at a municipal level would remove them from that team and remove them from their camaraderie and their commitment to keeping our community safe.

I'm concerned. What are they going to do? They're going to either keep people away from pursuing an interest in serving their communities at the municipal level as a potential councillor, or our volunteer firefighters and our fire departments will suffer and not have as many volunteers to call upon. It's not right. This government, as I said, has proven themselves to be yet again disconnected from the realities of rural Ontario.

Now, let's talk a little bit about regulation. In the PC Party, we also have concerns that many of the important details of this bill are left to regulation and not subject to parliamentary process and public scrutiny. It makes me think of Bill 172. A lot of the cap-and-trade scheme, if you will, that this government is introducing will be achieved through regulation. I can't stress how many businesses, how many organizations, are very anxious and worried about what regulations will do to them and their businesses and their future, for that matter, as they define this scheme behind closed doors via regulation.

In fact, going back to Bill 181, whole sections of this proposed legislation could be overruled by regulation, despite having gone through the legislative process. Again, how democratic is that? Regulations defined behind closed doors, behind these closed government doors, will not be open to debate in the public forum of this wonderful chamber in the legislative House of Ontario. Instead, it will be decided upon behind closed doors, by bureaucrats who have been given their lead by the minister or cabinet.

One example that I specifically want to outline today is section 41.1, subsection 6. It states, "If, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, it is necessary or desirable in order to further the purposes of this section and this act, the regulation may vary the operation of any of the following provisions of this act or may provide that any of the following provisions do not apply with respect to a ranked ballot election...."

Following that, there are no less than 10 sections, subsections and clauses that could be changed or entirely struck out at the whim of a regulation. This should give everyone cause for worry. The legislative process, as you know, Speaker, is in place to ensure that there is accountable, transparent government. That's what this government across the floor stood on. That's what we heard about in the throne speech after we came back.

Sadly, there is absolutely no proof through the years and the last few months that this government is adhering to its own path of transparency and accountability. They have totally thrown that to the wind. Instead, they're covering their backs, they're circling their wagons and they're closing their doors because they know they've failed Ontarians and the only way forward is to continue to do things behind closed doors.

The people of this province have a right to know the details of how they select their representatives municipally. That should not change, election year to election year, simply because three ministers are able to sit in a room together and contrive a new approach. Speaker, we've heard that people across Ontario and Canada are struggling to feel like their voice counts. If that process is allowed to continuously change at the leisure of those who control the system, the good intentions to increase voter turnout will ultimately fail. That was one of the worries that I shared at the onset of jumping into this debate today.

Public consultation is absolutely void in this government. It doesn't matter whether it's the Green Energy Act—we just met with the Environmental Commissioner last week. The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock had a representative of a local municipality in her riding come forward and say that they're actually redacting and and disallowing the realities around noise with regard to the industrial wind turbines. They're absolutely not allowing it. Then they have the nerve, in an ERT, to come forward with a position saying, "Well, there were no complaints."

Interjection.

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Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes. After they redacted and did not allow any discussion further on noise complaints with regard to industrial wind turbines, they said there were no complaints. It's shameful how this government is acting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to stand in this fine Legislature this morning and add my two cents and my two minutes to the thoughtful comments from my colleague from Huron–Bruce on Bill 181, focusing on municipal elections and proposed changes.

I would like to say to the member from Huron–Bruce that I appreciated her starting us off with reminding us to celebrate leadership and mentorship within our own ridings, as she had told us the story of the first and second clerks in her area and how they served the public and upheld democracy. I think that's where we should be starting our conversation from, a spirit of engagement, because if we're going to talk about democracy, we do need to focus on engaging people and bringing them into the process and making sure that any barriers to engagement don't exist, whether that's for those who are seeking to run as candidates or for those who are wanting to vote. Anywhere that we can reduce those barriers, we need to.

To her point that people must have their say and acknowledging people's feelings of frustration with the process, we do need a process that reflects the voices, the wants and needs of our municipalities, of the engaged public. We do need, and I forget how she worded it, a modern, effective, democratic—and there was a fourth point, maybe open or transparent, perhaps—process. That is what we want to have. That is the direction that we need to go.

Also, I think it's important to keep having the conversation, that any time this government is making decisions behind closed doors without the consultations that are necessary, we have concerns. So we continue to debate this and hold them to account.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the interesting comments by the member from Huron–Bruce. I remember here in Toronto we had a referendum where 76% of the people of Toronto said they didn't want the megacity and they didn't want their municipalities amalgamated, yet the government of the time still forced the amalgamation. Talk about local democracy.

The other point here is that municipalities have the option of whether to have the ranked ballot system or not. That choice is given to every local municipality.

The other changes proposed in the act, a lot of them, are quite complex, and to try to get agreement on all of these is going to be quite interesting, because I'm sure if you talked to the over 400 mayors and reeves across Ontario, you're going to get so many different opinions and so many different variations. But I think the main thing about this act is that it's at least starting—over the last year, there has been a good discussion and debate about municipal elections.

I know that when we talk about voter turnout, the voter turnout in Toronto has been going up every year. I know people think there is a magical way of increasing voter turnout. The best way I see of increasing voter turnout is by interesting the electorate. If you've got boring campaigns, boring candidates, the electorate doesn't come out to vote. Luckily, in Toronto over the last decade, we've had a lot of interesting engagement, and it's very healthy in terms of seeing the turnout go up. I don't think you're going to find a quick fix.

I hope to talk about my pet peeve on this in the future, but I'll let you know about that later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to talk about my pet peeve in this bill. I've talked to four ministers about this, and numerous ministry staff. It's about the new section that's in the act, section 88.24.

Presently, what happened in the system is that if you didn't file with the clerk, you would be basically disbarred out of office. Many, many councillors in my riding and across the province ended up paying thousands of dollars—some in excess of $10,000—to go to the judge and basically say, "I didn't know the provisions," or "They weren't explained to me." And every time, the judge gave them their seat back.

I went to ministers over and over and over again and said, "Why are the penalties so excessive for municipalities as opposed to, for example, provincial politicians?" I think it was my NDP candidate in the last two elections who didn't file on the deadline, applied to the Chief Electoral Officer and was given an extension. Pretty easy, right? But in this case, previous to this section of the bill, that wasn't possible. In fact, in my riding, one of the clerks had a death in the family, and in fact, every member of council and every candidate was disbarred from office. They all collectively had to go to the judge and make an application to get put back. Not at any time did anybody from the ministry or any minister make any opportunity to make those changes. I had meetings with each and every one of them and asked them specifically to fix that.

Finally this section is fixed. I'm not particularly happy about the late filing fee of $500, even regardless of whether they can get it back. I think their rules for filing an extension for their expenses for the campaign should be exactly the same as our rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always an honour to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin.

I want to give a shout-out to the member from Huron–Bruce, who started out her comments this morning making points in regard to remarkable women who have come through this Legislature. I wanted to thank her, because I always like starting my day on a good note. It made me think of someone remarkable, a remarkable woman who actually gave me the opportunity of being here. For whatever reason—I don't know why—out of the five boys at home, she picked on me and punished me, because she carried me along to every one of the campaigns. I was along with her, and I quite hated it. But here I am today thanks to her. I miss her every day. My mom was definitely a woman who deserves to have her own statue.

She did highlight two big points that have stood out to me in her comments this morning, with the engagement process. Across Algoma–Manitoulin, I have 37 municipalities. This is going to be a huge task as far as engaging with each and every one's leadership, which we already started.

The bill is entitled An Act to amend Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make—key word—complementary amendments. Those complementary amendments should come without any concerns, without any discouragement of individuals participating at the municipal level. But this is what is actually happening. What raises alarms with me is that in many of my municipalities, many individuals wear different hats. People are on recreation committees. People are volunteer firefighters. People are on the council. People are on a variety of committees. This might hinder their opportunity to serve their communities.

So these are some of the things that I'm going to be going out and actually having that discussion about with a lot of my municipal leaders and fire departments, because as I said, we wear many hats in small communities in northern Ontario. This restricts us from being a participant in the future of our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Huron–Bruce for final comment.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I certainly appreciate the comments from the members from Oshawa, Eglinton–Lawrence, Leeds–Grenville and Algoma–Manitoulin.

It is all about engagement. I just want to reflect on a few comments and quotes that I have, reflecting on the fact that this government is all over the map. In February of this past year, an Insights West poll found that 65% of Canadians say a referendum should definitely or probably be held on any changes to an electoral system. What is concerning is the seemingly laissez-faire attitude that the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing has taken on the matter.

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When the lack of a referendum was criticized on social media, this minister took to Twitter with a response, saying, "Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it." But then—it's interesting—just this past week, there was an article from the Kingston Whig Standard quoting the Deputy Premier. She said, "The local voice does matter, but we are not prepared to give people a veto." This government is all over the map. I would suggest that the ministers get together with the Premier and their deputy to get their act together.

Mr. John Yakabuski: At the kitchen table.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes. Absolutely. You raise a good point. In no way should policy be devised around a private kitchen table. We're having too much of that.

I just want to close by sharing the position that the PC Party has. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition, my leader, Patrick Brown, said just this past weekend, "No government should rush through electoral reform without first putting it to the citizens to decide. The government of the day doesn't get to change the electoral system, given that they, themselves, are an interested party. I believe if you're going to change how we have elections ... a referendum is necessary." I couldn't agree more.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's my pleasure to join in the debate. First off, I think it's important that we address some of the concerns that have been raised in the previous municipal election, and this review resulted in some issues that were raised. Some of the key areas that people were concerned with were the way people were selecting their municipal leaders and the idea of a ranked ballot. There were some issues around the election calendar, and other key areas were some of the enforcement, which previous members have talked about; some of the imbalances with respect to the way the enforcement would apply to municipalities—they're much more strict; and how provincially, the enforcement rules are far different.

Some of the key areas that I want to touch on, and some of the key areas that I think are important to address—first and foremost, a ranked ballot option. I understand that this provides that option to municipalities. Now, we see all too often in elections, generally speaking, that the turnout is abysmally low. It's a serious problem. We look at the Canadian system, and the highest turnouts are in our federal, and then with every other level of government it becomes lower and lower. When it comes to provincial, it's lower than federal, and municipal elections are some of the lowest turnouts.

The funny thing is, and I'm sure you hear this all the time, Mr. Speaker, is that it's the municipal levels of government that probably have the most impact on our day-to-day lives, but that's where we have the lowest turnout. Some of the concern is that perhaps the system, or the way that the election process goes about it, is disenfranchising or discouraging people from being involved.

One of the solutions may be this ranked ballot system. It allows for a more interesting manner in which we select our leaders. But more important than allowing it in a more interesting manner, one of the things we see that we lack here in Ontario, specifically in Toronto, is that Toronto is probably one of the most diverse cities not only in Canada, but probably in the world, and despite that diversity, we don't see that diversity reflected in the municipal leadership.

What can we do to encourage the representation of more women, more racialized community members and people from different backgrounds? What can we do to make it more accessible? There is significant research and arguments are made that a ranked ballot system would make it easier to allow other individuals who are historically marginalized to be elected. Wherever there have been ranked ballot systems, more women have been elected and younger people are often elected, as well as more racialized members of the community are elected. That's a positive thing. If we can encourage that, I think that's something that should be supported. Allowing that opportunity or that option to municipalities is something that we should certainly look at, and I think that's a positive step in the right direction.

Generally speaking, though, we need to do more to make it easier to vote. I think that's something that's not really addressed in this bill that could have been addressed. I think, looking at this modern age—the 21st century, the digital age—we really need to look at how we can make it easier so that people can participate in the democratic system. It needs to be something that everyone is involved in. It needs to be something that is easy. We find that, whether it's in health promotion, people will do what's healthy if it's the easier option. People will choose the easier option. If you make the healthy option the easier option—which is a strong campaign in the health promotion field—people will choose that healthier option. So in the democratic realm, if we make it easier to be involved in your civic responsibility of

voting, if we make it more accessible, the idea would be that more people would be involved and more people would participate.

That's an area that this bill doesn't address, and I think it's something we should discuss here. Perhaps we can find ways to make some amendments in committee to ensure that—we can look at extending the hours. Many people work in the evening, and the cut-off being a strict 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. sometimes doesn't allow for people to get home from work, to refresh and then get back out into the lineups and vote.

We need to look at something that has been considered a number of times: Are there ways that we can find an online process, a digital process, where we can vote? I know the first response to that is always, "How do you prevent fraud? How do you prevent people from voting in an inappropriate manner?" I'm sure we can come up with some creative solutions, but to me, it just doesn't make sense that we're not making full use of the available technology to ensure that people vote; particularly, the accessibility issue for people who have different abilities, who aren't able to get out there physically and go vote, for whatever physical limitations in terms of their mobility. We need to have a strong and easy system for people to make sure that they can get out and vote.

Another area this bill talks about is third-party advertising. That's something that has been addressed and raised in all levels of government, whether it's federal or whether it's provincial and, again, obviously, at the municipal level as well. As a broad principle, the way our current system is laid out, it should be the case that the everyday person—that their voice is not eclipsed by individuals or corporations who have more power or more access to resources, and that shouldn't be a way of defining or a way of determining their ability to impact an election.

In the current system, with the third-party advertising rules as they are, there is the potential for people, organizations, corporations or entities with deep pockets to be able to influence elections in perhaps a way that discourages the true principles of democracy. That's something that people have raised as a concern. However, we also need to be very aware that, in addressing third-party advertising, we don't unfairly impact community organizations, which are actually the voice of the community. They're not an unfair representation of the voice of one small group, but in fact a representation of the entire community.

There are groups like ACORN, which speaks on behalf of tenants. They have a campaign called Toronto Tenants Vote, which encourages tenants to vote. We often find in voting turnout that those who own their own property are more likely to vote, but people who are renting—those who are tenants in an apartment building—are less likely to. So ACORN mounted a campaign to encourage more people to actually get out and vote. The concern is that, with very strict third-party advertising limitations, perhaps a campaign which is to encourage people to vote might be limited by these types of rules. So we need to be sure that we're addressing the actual concern, which is the disproportionate impact of an entity being able to have too much of a say or too much of a voice versus allowing community voices to be heard. In fact, a community organization which is actually trying to encourage more people to vote—that shouldn't be stopped.

There are other groups that do great work in our community that are by no means trying to usurp democracy or trying to overshadow the voice of the everyday person. Campaigns like the cancer society's Fighting for Life campaign was something that was a demand that this organization had to encourage municipalities to disclose the use and location of carcinogens. Now, that's a very fair demand and they're trying to speak for the concerns of everyday folks and people about where carcinogens are located, where they're being used and if municipalities are using them.

That type of campaign or that type of organization might be limited by the proposed laws. I guess that's something that we really need to focus in on. Are those the types of campaigns that we want to discourage? Is there a distinction between what we really want to limit when it comes to third-party advertising?

Another example: There's TTCriders. They do phenomenal work in our community with respect to promoting public transit. If during a campaign period they were to advertise the importance of public transit, that the community needs more public transit—as New Democrats, we fully support the idea that we need to aggressively invest in improving our public transit and infrastructure. If they were to mount a campaign to promote these issues during a political campaign, they might be precluded from doing so, though their whole organization is built up on membership of local community members. They are the voice of people in the public, in the community, and they're simply voicing the concerns of their members. Now, if they're precluded from being involved in voicing their concerns and the concerns of their members, again, are we really addressing the real concerns when it comes to third-party advertising? That's another concern.

To bring it closer to home on a specific issue, the sell-off of our Hydro One is an issue that impacts various community members. It's something that's going to impact our province, broadly speaking. Community organizations that come together to say, "This is something we need to oppose," and perhaps there's a campaign during an election period where they want to talk municipally about this issue and say, "Listen, this is something that should be brought up by our municipal leaders"—if various groups come together and band together on this issue, the concern is that they might be precluded from using a united platform to raise this issue and perhaps engage in town halls or engage in some form of organizing to get people together to say, "Listen, this public asset is being sold off. Let's organize so that, at least on the municipal level, we can have a voice in our municipal level of government that opposes this." Perhaps that

organizing itself might be limited due to this proposed amendment of third-party advertising.

That's, again, why it's so important for us to really home in on what it is that we really want to limit. We want to limit the unfair advantage that deep pockets or greater resources might have on your ability to have a louder voice in a democratic system than one individual or groups of individuals. That's something that we really need to focus in on: Do we cast the net too broadly and cover organizations or community groups that are actually doing important work in expressing the concerns of the community, providing a platform for that? Are they going to be precluded because of these rules? That's something we certainly need to take a look at.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time. I don't want to go over and leave you in a position where you have to quickly stop me. I've noticed your indication; thank you very much for that.

In wrapping up—I will have more time to address these issues in more detail later on—there are a number of very good changes that are proposed by this bill. There are more areas that need more clarity. I look forward, later on, to providing more details and perhaps some suggestions on how we can improve. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank all members for their debate this morning. Since it is close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we move on to introduction of guests, I want you to know that I will be introducing the Speaker's guests in the gallery and that we will be as brief as possible, as there seems to be a very large number of visitors today. So let's move that along.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to introduce today students from the Robert Land Academy in my riding—I'm proud to say I'm a board member; I'm honoured to be on the board at Robert Land—and their leadership Major Kevin Wendling, Lieutenant Rick Infantino, Lieutenant Stewart Jones, and Captain Geoff Bowman. Again, welcome to the cadets from the Robert Land Academy.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's Girls' Government day here, and I just want to introduce, from Humbercrest Public School, teacher Kathleen Scott-Houchen and students Emma Stuart Kiss, Ryley Nathaniel, Ameera Bogle, Lucy Hanna, Armita Ebrahimnejad and Sumaya Goulet; and from St. James Catholic School, teacher Cecilia DeMonte Bahr, Jasmine Dos Santos, Sophia Laspinas, Milda Gutauskaite, Jeniffer Aguilar, Kyara Charles, Sydney Turnbull and Breanna Lewis-Patterson. And Equal Voice is in the House as well.

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's my pleasure to welcome representatives of the National Airlines Council of Canada and their partners to the Legislature today. I understand they have a full day of meetings with members and staff from all parties and are looking forward to discussing the aviation and tourism sectors with all of us today. Welcome to the gallery.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome, in the west members' gallery, Ms. Susan Pearce, with the Ontario Autism Coalition, formerly of Sarnia–Lambton and now of Toronto.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, the House is full today with families of autism, and they're joining us here today. I'm going to start the list by welcoming Erin Syer, Lelia Greenfield, Kirk Greenfield, Tetyana Kofanova, Erin Rogerson, Terry Wright, Jill Breugem, Jennifer Majer, Sarah Haight, Charan Machado, Glen Machado, Irine Ogrodnik, David Galvao, Linda Galvao, Nancy Silva Khan, Dylan Dias, Anita Marques, Josie Spatafora, Anne Mason, Sarah Jones, Niveen Shrem, Lisa Kota, Robin Konstantopoulos, David Lehtinen, Jennifer Chu, Nicole Taylor, Paul Taylor and Gary Burbridge.

Many more will be introduced by my other caucus members. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to congratulate Cooper Stone from Durham, who is page captain here today, and to welcome his family in the east members' gallery to Queen's Park: his mom and dad, Jen and Gareth; sister Sophia; and grandparents Michael, Nancy, Michael and Susan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to echo my NDP colleagues' welcome to families with children who have autism, but most particularly, I want to welcome Nathan, who made my day this morning by giving me a great big Queen's Park hug. Welcome.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I too wish to introduce parents who are here on the autism issue: Alexandra Dezenhouse, Kelly Dunklee, Adelia Novielli, Fatima Tavaniello, Natalie Proia, Sonia Carnovale, Nick Carnovale, Jennifer Taylor, Melanie Cooper, Jeanne-Marie Brennan, Amanda Martin, Gasparino Strazzeri, Cheyenne Procenko and David Procenko.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome three groups of students from my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt: from the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy, teacher Jacqueline Smith and students Reem Wahab, Hanifa Beni-Asaf, Mariam Saleem and Aravi Shanmugalingam; from Kennedy Public School, the principal, Rhonda Cohen-Pierobon, teacher Camille Khan and students Joey Zhuo, Lily Cao, Jessica Zhang and Anson Wu; and from St. Sylvester Catholic School, the principal, Roy Fernandes, will be joining us shortly, with teacher Oycie Povo and students Madonna Estefanos, Briana Pereira, Katrina Villarino and Juno Lins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome to question period Ms. Nancy Laver, who is here to discuss autism with us today.

Mr. Paul Miller: Further to the list that the honourable member from Hamilton Mountain added: Angela Mok, Evelyn Wong, Hubert Wong, Anthony Konstantopoulos, Jeff Lipinski and Monique Saunders. Welcome.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park the Rolling Meadows elementary school grade 8 girls leadership group and their teachers, Tanya Ferro and Sandra Lumsden, from my riding in Burlington. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome the parents who drove in from Kitchener to also attend the autism press conference this morning. Welcome, parents from Kitchener.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd also like to welcome some families dealing with autism. They are Kimberly Murray, Tammy Frazer, Rebecca Haight, Jenna Lech, Raquel Turner, Ingrid Rijo, Marie Fatima Soares Goncalves, Elisha Chesler, Stephanie Giguere, Nisha Kapadia, Daniela Tripolino, Giuseppina Chaves, Eleonora Morgillo and Andrea Rios.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to welcome 14 students from my riding of Davenport participating in Girls' Government day at the Legislature today. I want to welcome the girls from St. Clare, accompanied by principal Manuela Sequeira; St. Nicholas of Bari with their vice-principal, Ms. Ruscitto-D'Addario; and from my very own elementary school, St. Rita, the girls who are here today with their teacher, Mr. Contiga. Welcome, girls, and have a great day here at Queen's Park.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to welcome Susan Pearce and the many people from York region who have come here to emphasize the importance of autism.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to welcome a number of other families who have joined us today for the autism news conference: Stan Byma, Ilinaz Naeli, Tania Ratnam, Sherie and Mark Hatfield, Rachel Nicole Williams, Samantha Lynn Bliss, Nancy Marchese, Kristen Ellison, Heather Bourdon, and Linda, Anthony and Tony DiMambro.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I, too, would like to welcome Kristen Ellison from the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. I had the pleasure of meeting her last Friday.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to introduce Diana Santucci, Sabrina Puopolo, Nicole DeVries, Michael DeVries, Emanuele Caruso, Venette Gerden, Jing Ding, Michelle Makris, Malgorzata Szypula, Gurjeet Gakhal, Aiden Gakhal, Tobi Riley, Dayna Janicki, Louella Mendonsa, Tracey-Anne White, Marimuthu Ramakrishnan, Vidhya Thangam and Shrinithin Marimuthu, who are here to fight for their children and all children in the province of Ontario with autism.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to welcome all the families here today who are here to speak out about autism and the challenges that they face.

I'd like to welcome Jowita Filipowicz, Mieszko Filipowicz, Edgar Filipowicz, Victoria Filipowicz, Dr. Janet McLaughlin, Carmen Genuardi-Binns, Eva Bissell, Stephanie Gallant, Isabella Bissell, Francesca Bissell, Jeremy Pottle, Debbie Samuels, Laura Martin and Sampaguita Tan.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a pleasure to welcome my constituent Chrissy Orr, who's a civics teacher with Neil McNeil High School and here with her class of civic students, our young leaders of tomorrow. Welcome.

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M^me^ France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à Queen's Park aux gens qui sont ici pour appuyer les enfants avec l'autisme. Je commence avec Carmel Bourdon, Bren et Christina Vieira, Tanya Corey, Melissa Bottoni, Samantha Billings, Julian McDowell, Ivy La Rue, Stephanie Kerschbaumer, Mason Riley, Natalie Janicki, Anna Kim, Nancy Marchese and Yanina Kanevsky. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Dave Camilleri, Hadil Lewis, Sabrina Tavares, Fatima Costa, Diana Rojas, George Kourtis, Nina Pereira, Christina Charalambous, Stephanie MacLellan, Catherine Brunner, Cassandra Burton, Dora Ferreira, Georgea Sarantopoulos, Abbey McCann and, from Waterloo, Laura Martin, Niveen Shrem and Sarah Jones. Thank you for coming today.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Kevin Wendling, who is the father to page Ariel Wendling and who is here with us in this session. He's in the members' gallery.

I'd also like to introduce some families dealing with autism who are here for the media event today: Daniela Dattomo, Jennifer David-Ortuoste, Joshua Wong, Georgette Spence-Morris, Peter Leung, Yuet Hei Lam, Catharine Grossi, Jessica Cabral, Jennifer Heath, Venette Gerden, Janet Bojti, Cynthia Capa, Joslin Lopez and Flora Ho. Welcome.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Further names I'd like to introduce in regard to the fight against autism: Melissa Mark, Tina Pinto, Pedro Pinto, Nathan Pinto, Michael Luchka, Alice Billones, Shannon Beauregard, Matthew Kuzmic, Steve Kuzmic, Chelsey Rupnow, Scott Parker, Marlene Pereira, Meghan Stevens and Rachel Lam.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We have more members here visiting today from the autism coalition: Tia-Paz Riopel, Tajtan Kuzmic, Karel Kuzmic, Sheng-Xiang Ding, Zhiyun Duan, Matthew Joseph Perusco, Ryan Fentie, Susan Fentie-Pearce, Melissa Page, James D'Aprile, Rosaria Micks, Kayla Medeiros, Nakita Medeiros and LeeAnn Gallo.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would also like to welcome members of the autism coalition, and I apologize to anyone whose name I do not pronounce correctly: Stephanie Galluzzo, Nellie and Pavlos Simtikidis, Ross Maclean, Korine Goodman-Maclean, Brenna Bloodworth, Amy Hackett, Itai Sever, Sophia Sairoglou, Heather Bourdon, Dominique Bourdon, Jacob Bourdon and Gianna Bourdon. Welcome.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes. I'm pleased to rise to welcome the parents who are here fighting for their children: Adrian Lee, George Kurtis, Carolyn Martin, Bruce McIntosh and Karen Palmer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm also pleased to welcome those who are here fighting against the government's autism cuts—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Welcome to Laura Levesque, Sheri Robinson, Kent Robinson, Keegan Robinson, Ruby Robinson, Dr. James Porter, Kurt Lingenfelter, Stephanie Ridley, Nancy Laver, Ashley Tyler, Amy McIntosh, Cory Farrell, Sharon Gabison and Jaclyn Atkins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I just want to do a special thank you to the members who joined us on the panel this morning: Dr. James Porter, Kristen Ellison and Heather Bourdon. Welcome, everybody, to Queen's Park today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It wasn't lost on me that I do have rules to follow, and I know the members have rules to follow. My lenience was tested a couple of times. I would appreciate all members to abide by those offers. The five-minute limitation is actually when it should have stopped, but because I understand that we have visitors and we want them introduced, I allowed that to happen. But I would say that taking liberty would not be, in my book, getting along with the Speaker.

Would members please join me in welcoming the family of the late Mr. Frank Sheehan, MPP for Lincoln during the 36th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his wife, Diane; daughters Marguerite, Rebecca and Trish; sons Gordon and Vincent, with his wife, Tricia Fang; his siblings, Sister Agnes Toni Sheehan and Joe, with his wife, Mary Frances; and his grandchildren, Jacob, Molly, Ben, Will and Elizabeth Sheehan, Erin Sukkau, Sam and Nicholas Nolan, Catherine Schmidt and her husband, Jordan.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is Mr. Steve Gilchrist, former MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; and Mr. Michael Harris, MPP for Nipissing during the 32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th Parliaments, and Premier during the 36th and 37th Parliaments.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

FRANK SHEEHAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Good morning, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Frank Sheehan, former member for Lincoln, 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. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to first take the opportunity to welcome the family and guests of Frank Sheehan, who are here at Queen's Park today to pay tribute to a man who was an MPP for the PC Party and who passed away on December 17, 2013.

Frank took his first step into politics as a school board trustee for the Lincoln county separate school board and then, later, as a PC MPP for the former riding of Lincoln. Frank held that seat for four years, until 1999, when the riding boundaries changed to include a very different political climate in that riding.

Frank had a reputation for being a community heavyweight. He's remembered for his tireless work and how he championed his community and his constituents. His reputation for never being able to sit down, keep still or slow down is reflected in the countless number of causes he led and championed and many that he founded. Whether he was busy with chairing the Red Tape Commission in those days or co-founding the local Wayside House in his community, which was a transitional housing program for recovering drug addicts—just a couple of many initiatives that Frank undertook and helped lead for more than 40 years in the Niagara area. These are just a few of the testaments to his willingness to work hard and want to leave his community in better shape.

In the lead-up to his political life, he was hoping to follow in his father's footsteps to become a plumber and get involved in the plumbing business. That proved to be not in his cards, so he went on to the insurance business instead, founding a well-known insurance company, Sheehan and Rosie, which he ran successfully for more than 50 years.

His motivations to enter politics really speak to the person. He said that he didn't like the way things were and so he wanted to make a difference. His principles and his fearlessness on issues that were not always popular here and otherwise were nonetheless respected, if not always supported, even within his own caucus. It is often said that you knew exactly where he stood on any issue. He was blunt, frank—no pun intended—and honest, traits appreciated by many. It was never personal. He fundamentally believed in tackling issues and not people.

The footprint Frank left behind in Niagara alone is a testament to that. When he wasn't busy championing issues here at Queen's Park for his constituents, he was busy helping at-risk youth and community members as the former president of the John Howard Society in Niagara. He left an invaluable mark on many programs and initiatives and, of course, the people who served in those programs. He dedicated much of his time to a program that's still running in the Niagara region, the Out of the Cold program, an emergency program that provides warmth, a meal and fellowship in participating churches and public buildings.

1050

The Ozanam Centre of St. Catharines wouldn't be the same without Frank's leadership and time. The centre in St. Catharines opens its doors and serves more than 100 people a day with lunch and friendship. He also was very active in driving cancer patients to and from their treatments, from Niagara—just a few of the organizations that Frank was involved in that spoke to his nature, his community spirit and his caring values.

In closing, I know that many of us, politicians included, often cringe at the thought of reading about ourselves in letters to the editor, or comments about us in local newspapers. But in reading some of the comments after

Frank passed away, I thought they were important to share.

One person commented after his passing that he was a "man whose word you could take to the bank! A missing feature in most other politicians today!" Another person's comment: "My father passed away in June of 1995; his visitation was on June 8, the day of the election" that year. "During the evening visitation, when the elections results were starting to come in, Frank Sheehan quietly arrived at the funeral home to" pay respect and to "extend his sympathies to my mother.... I have never forgotten that moment."

In closing, although I only met Frank once or twice while he was in politics, it was a pleasure to do a little research, to discover his many qualities that I was not aware of and to have the honour of paying tribute to Frank Sheehan.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I had the opportunity and privilege of serving in the Legislative Assembly with Frank Sheehan. There are some people who will be forgettable, perhaps because they did not have huge impacts, one place or another. Frank was unforgettable; I can assure you of that.

The very fact that Mike Harris, the former Premier of the province of Ontario, is here today is evidence of the very significant role that Frank played within the Common Sense Revolution that was part of the regime of Mike Harris when he governed the province from 1995 to 2003, with Ernie Eves as the Premier at that time.

Frank was a guy who—even those people who disagreed with him really grew to like him very much. We used to sit at night from time to time, and I'd get an opportunity to go across the floor and chat with him about a number of things that related to St. Catharines, some of which didn't relate to politics at all. You could see his deep love for and involvement in the community.

Many people said he was a penny-pincher, and he was a penny-pincher, but a penny-pincher with taxpayers' dollars. With his own dollars, he was extremely generous to the people of our community and well beyond our borders—generous not only with money but generous with his time and with his involvement in the community.

You would expect that when the regime was in power at that time—they were a law-and-order group of people—Frank would be totally law and order, and those who had been convicted at some time or other would have been persona non grata. Frank actually took people like that under his wing. With youth, he tried to ensure that they would not become involved on the wrong side of the law. When he ran Wayside House, people would say, "Here's a right-wing Conservative. What is he doing running Wayside House?" That was the feeling he had for people in the community who had gone astray in one way or another.

At the John Howard Society, again an organization that dealt with people who were on the wrong side of the law from time to time, Frank wasn't afraid to take that on as a personal cause. I remember that there were cuts made, so that Wayside House had to essentially close. To show his consistency—Frank was always consistent. He could have said, "Everything else should be cut, but not Wayside House." He didn't say that. His reaction at the time was to say, "If we are going in this direction, if we have to make cuts, then I can't be exempted and my organization can't be exempted from those cuts." So he was very, very consistent in that regard.

I think there were three nuns and two priests in the family. Frank would not fit into that category, I can assure you—either one. He was once asked why he got into politics. He said he was tired of the frigging NDP and the frigging Liberals. Somebody asked him about that later; he said, "I didn't say 'frigging.'"

Laughter.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I won't say what he said, but anyway.

Another way you judge a person, I suppose—and it may be superficial, but I think it's meaningful—is who shows up at the funeral home and who shows up at the funeral itself. There was a long line of people. If you wanted to greet the family on the occasion to express your sympathy, you were in a long line at the funeral home, because that's the impact he had across the community.

I mentioned him being rough and tough. He was also head of the Niagara Symphony Association at one time. He helped out with Women's Place, which is a shelter for abused women and members of their family. He had touched a lot of people in the community.

It was a full house for the funeral and there were people from all kinds of backgrounds, some who no doubt had cursed Frank at one time or other, who were there to pay tribute to him because they knew he was consistent and that he was a man of immense principle, as far as I could see.

By the way, you know how sometimes people try to develop a consensus on an issue? Consensus was not in the vocabulary of Frank Sheehan. He staked out his position and he defended that position with his heart and his soul and his mind.

Most of the attributes that he had can be found in the members of the family, whether they are siblings or whether they are children. Frank set a tough standard for members of the family, and they lived up to it. We're extremely grateful to the family for sharing Frank with us in the Legislative Assembly for a period of time.

Members of the Legislature—there are lot of people who will sit on the sidelines and throw rocks at those who are in public office. I always admire a person who will put his or her views on the line and run for public office, and Frank did, for the Roman Catholic Separate School Board in Lincoln, and later for the Legislative Assembly. Then he took on a tough fight against another icon in the Niagara Peninsula by the name of Peter Kormos. He wasn't afraid to take on that fight and he wasn't afraid to lose, if he knew he was going to go down standing for something he believed in.

I can speak for our community, and I think our Legislature, in saying that we were a better place in here and a

better place in our community because of the generous contribution that Frank Sheehan made to St. Catharines and Niagara, to the province of Ontario and to our country.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Francis Xavier Sheehan was one of 10 kids in his family. As Mr. Bradley noted, the first three, the elder three sisters, were all literally sisters—they're nuns—and two Basilian priests as brothers. So when Frank passed, he certainly had a lot of folks who could put a good word in for him to get through the Pearly Gates.

But I think Frank made it on his own, so I'm going to tell you a little bit about why I can say that. Believe it or not, Frank actually did follow the family tradition and enrolled in seminary. He was there for six months. It didn't take. There was a little too much mischief, I think, in those eyes, to all those who knew Frank, for it to last. Eldest son Gordon said, "Thank God it didn't," or the gallery would be less full today.

Frank had an extraordinarily big heart. He came back from seminary and he was trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life and, as was mentioned by my colleague from Niagara Centre, he went to work for his dad in the Sheehan Plumbing and Heating business in St. Catharines. I didn't know Frank's dad, but I'm going to guess they were quite similar, because Gordon related a conversation to me where Frank came on board and it just didn't take, it didn't work out so much in the business. So his dad said to him one day, "You know, Francis, you've got a big mouth." Francis replied, "Well, you paid enough for it." Then dad said, "I don't think this is working out." Frank said, "Me, neither," and he up and quit. A little while later his dad said, "Frank, what do you want to do with the rest of your life?" Frank said, "I don't know." So he said, "Why don't you go and join your uncle?" Uncle Hubert had just taken over the family insurance business, Sheehan Insurance. Frank said, "I don't know anything about insurance." His dad said, "Neither does Hubert, so why don't you go ahead?" And that took.

Frank was a legend in the insurance business. He built up Sheehan and Rosie. He was extraordinarily generous, through the company and through himself. He took a leadership position provincially—I think nationally, if memory serves—with the insurance brokers as well, and then found his way here in 1995 in the cast of 82 characters we called the government, in June 1995.

1100

Premier Mike Harris is here today. It's no surprise to see the Premier here, because he said he looked at his entire team, and the one person in his caucus who had the principles and the backbone to be his leader of the Red Tape Commission, by and far—easy call—was Frank Sheehan. He made the right call.

I'll tell you a quick story. In cabinet one day—and Frank was there. To Premier Harris's credit, the head of the Red Tape Commission was at those cabinet meetings. One veteran minister—not present company; no longer here in the assembly—was bringing through a new bill. The bill had all kinds of new rules and regulations in it. Frank took them on, right there at the cabinet table, and said, "This has got to go through" what he called "a regulatory knothole." That was his term.

The minister got frustrated. "Who is this? He's not a minister. What's he doing at the table? I can get what I want." The minister actually said, "We're just getting rid of red tape and doing blue tape instead." Premier Harris said, "That's exactly the point," and Frank got his way.

Then, as cabinet, we knew what the ballgame was. We took Frank seriously, the committee work that he did. You had to get his blessing to get a bill through. Then, after all those years, he kicked down 2,100 unnecessary government regulations. Fifteen red-tape bills actually passed here in the assembly.

An interesting thing about Frank, too—because he was not a big-government guy—he had tremendous respect for the civil service.

He actually compared reducing red tape to teaching elephants to dance. He said, "It's really hard, but when you get it done, it's an awesome spectacle."

Frank got it done. I spoke with Bill Mantel, a current ADM, who was one of the key people on the Red Tape Commission and a respected civil servant. I said, "Bill, why did this work?" He said, "Because of two reasons: Frank didn't suffer fools. He wouldn't take no for an answer."

He made progress. If a minister was not following the line that Premier Harris laid out, Frank would end the meeting and walk out on the minister. That sends a signal pretty fast. It also gave ministries an opportunity to actually get stuff done that otherwise they wouldn't. There was tremendous respect for what Frank did and for his leadership, not only on the political level but throughout the civil service.

One story I'll quickly tell: Frank and I also had a huge fight. I probably would have lost that fight, because it's hard to think of another more determined, focused and driven individual I've had the honour of serving with here in the assembly. It was because our ridings came together in 1999. Here I was, coming from Erie; Frank was Lincoln. The two ridings merged. A lot of MPPs fought. I said, "Holy crow, now I've got to take on Frank Sheehan. How's that going to work out for me, as a rookie MPP?"

Frank took me aside and put his arm around me. This conversation was probably in early 1999. He called me Timmy, like he was my football coach or something. He said, "Timmy, you've got a bright future in this business. I'm not going to run in Erie–Lincoln. And besides that, somebody's got to take on that socialist in cowboy boots next door." Frank took him on, and I think he gave Kormos a scare too, which is, I think, an incredible thing. Maybe that debate continues somewhere else today.

My colleagues talked about how Frank had a reputation for being gruff, tough-minded and determined, but they also talked, accurately, about how he had a big heart, in some personal stories.

There's a theme, too, that you pick up of the prodigal son, if you will, in Frank's good deeds. Wayside House helps recovering drug addicts get back on the straight and narrow. He was a big leader in the John Howard Society, helping people who had been in prison to get back on the right path.

Robert Land Academy is here today as well. I'm honoured to serve on their board. This is for young boys who have wandered away, to help bring them back. Frank was a regular guest there. In fact, headmaster Scott Bowman told me, "Frank would often tell the cadets some rather salty stories, but they loved it." When the headmaster tried to censor Frank and look at his remarks beforehand, Frank Sheehan never listened. They loved him at the Robert Land Academy. He was a guide for them, for a man of principle and the success he can have.

At the end of the day too, I think what was remarkable was—Jim mentioned his funeral—there were people there from all walks of life, all political parties. There was a wake, with lots of dignitaries there at the same time. It's because we always have this image of the politician who is a generous and public person but a miser with their own. Frank was the absolute opposite of that. He was that way not because he thought government was bad. He just believed that a lot of people didn't have much money left in their pockets after a lot was taken away. But he also had a big faith in humanity because Frank believed, too, that if more people had money in their pockets they would give generously, just like he did. He was, at his heart, an optimist and loved people.

A lot of folks wondered who among all of these dignitaries was going to make the big speech at the wake after the funeral. Gord decided Frank wouldn't want that. In Frank's life he always said that the good deeds speak for themselves; you don't wear them on your sleeve. That's exactly the most important lesson of what Frank Sheehan has taught us. Thanks for those good deeds. God bless. Thank you.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all the members for their kind, thoughtful and heartfelt comments. To the family, thank you for the gift of Frank. We will, as we have always done, provide you with a copy of Hansard and a DVD of today's testimonies. Thank you so much again for the life of Frank.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Just look at the parents here today at Queen's Park. These are parents with remarkable young children who just happen to have autism. Intensive behavioural intervention, IBI, has been a proven treatment for many of these children. The impact and progress made by these children using IBI programs is amazing and undeniable. Mr. Speaker, why is the government turning their back on these children and these parents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to welcome the parents and the children who are here. This is obviously an extremely important issue for all of us. We have for a number of years, as a government and as individuals within this government, worked with the organizations of parents working with children with autism to make the changes, as new science is discovered and as new programs are developed, to make sure that we provide to children the resources that they need.

What is unacceptable to us, Mr. Speaker, is that children would languish on a waiting list and not get service. That is what is happening now, and so it is incredibly important that we put the investments in place to help children get the services that they need. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. What is unacceptable is these cuts to families with autism. I want to read you a quote from Lisa Meunier that was in the Canadian Press article written by Allison Jones. Ms. Meunier is a Brampton mom who has a nearly five-year-old daughter who has been on the IBI wait-list for almost three years. She said that the government funding will only pay for a few weeks of therapy. She said, "I'm disappointed that the government would do that to our children," and that "there is therapy out there that can help our children and now they're just taking that away from them."

Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't let these children and parents down. It's not the Ontario way. It's not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing? Will she reinstate proper funding for IBI treatment?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think all of us know that with the prevalence of autism increasing, which is in and of itself a huge challenge—I know that there's work going on in our laboratories here in Ontario to look at the genetics, Mr. Speaker, to find answers to why this is happening and what the best treatment should be.

What has happened is that the wait times have increased and so the status quo is unacceptable. The Leader of the Opposition actually makes my point, because he talks about families whose children have been on that wait-list for three years. That's unacceptable because that window for the treatment closes. It is demonstrated that the efficacy of that intensive treatment is in the early years. That's why our budget makes a historic $333-million investment. We're putting in place a new autism program, Mr. Speaker. It will give 16,000 more children access to services and it will provide a continuum of intensive services—

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

Final supplementary.

1110

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: This government's approach is to remove people outright from the wait-list. That's not solving the wait-list. There wouldn't be thousands and thousands of families irate about this if

it wasn't affecting the services that they desperately needed for their children.

The changes to IBI have been called destructive. Families have been left in the dark. Just listen to what Joseph Daley of the Grimsby Lincoln News said: "The policy changes of the Ontario government are condemning my child to a life of ongoing illness on top of the challenges he will face as an autistic individual."

Thousands and thousands of families are telling the Premier her changes are dead wrong. Does the Premier agree with the fundamental principle that autism doesn't end at age 5?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker—absolutely. What this program recognizes is exactly that: that there needs to be a continuum of service. So we cut the wait times in half and 16,000 more children get service. The families—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin–Caledon, come to order please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The children who have been languishing on the wait-list and who we are letting down at this moment, because the status quo is letting them down, will transition off the wait-list—$8,000 initially—and then they will be eligible for the new autism program that will have intensive ABA and will recognize that there's a continuum of intensive service that is necessary. That's what the new program will provide: a continuity of service. That is what the best science is telling us is necessary.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on autism, let's try something else.

I was very disappointed with the meeting that occurred yesterday on the Liberal donation scandal. It was a Liberal PR stunt. I can tell you, despite the meeting being a sham, that we will not back down. We will not be bullied into dropping our request for a public inquiry.

Yesterday, the Premier claimed that political donations have never bought a policy in her government. This comes despite numerous examples that are causing the public to question this government's integrity.

So let's try it another way. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Has the Premier ever given out a government grant in exchange for future political donations? Yes or no?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Again, I'm going to take the time to remind members that impugning motive takes different characteristics, and it's getting closer. I'm going to remind the member to guard his questions.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is no. That's not how decisions are made in our government. There are very clear protocols and processes.

Look, I'm committed to changing political donations in Ontario. There's a broad consensus on the actions that need to be taken to update Ontario's rules. In fact, I had a meeting with the leader of the Green Party this morning, and he brought in a set of proposals that were very reflective of the proposals that I had brought to the leaders yesterday. I think that there is a broad consensus. This consensus is the basis of what I brought forward to the leaders of the opposition.

It's interesting to me; in preparation for what I deemed to be an important meeting with the leaders of the opposition, I did some work at home getting ready for the meeting. Somehow, that's an unacceptable thing. Well, I don't know how the leaders of the opposition parties work, but it was an important meeting. I brought some proposals forward looking at all—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I did some preparatory work to bring forward some proposals based on what I saw as the consensus in all of the discussion and in other jurisdictions in the hope that we would have a substantive discussion about those issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I recognize that the Premier wants me to drop my request for a public inquiry, but I will continue to raise examples in the Legislature and around Ontario for exactly why we need a public inquiry. So let's start with another one today.

In October 2013, the Liberals quietly gave Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment $500,000. That's a $2.25-billion company that the Liberals gave public money to; the world's second wealthiest sporting organization. They didn't announce this grant, they just quietly handed the money over and, surprise, surprise, MLSE turned around and donated nearly $30,000 despite never donating to any political party before.

Did the Premier, a member of her staff, an MPP—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the deputy House leader to refrain and to withdraw.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Withdraw.

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

It is a testimony to what I've been trying to ask you to do: to guard your questions and comments. This place is not the place to impugn motive.

Please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Did the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Does the member from Renfrew care to challenge the Chair?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Then don't say anything.

Carry on.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Did the Premier or a member of her staff pressure MLSE in any way to donate to the Liberal Party in exchange for that $500,000?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition—I know he is going to continue to ask for a public inquiry. I've been very clear that

this whole discussion is born of a need to modernize the rules, to update the fundraising rules, and that's what we're going to do.

I brought forward a set of proposals yesterday. I've proposed reform of third-party advertising rules; a ban on corporate union donations; a reduction of maximum allowable donations to a figure that's in the range of what's permitted federally for each party; constraints on loans and loan guarantees to parties and candidates, including leadership candidates; reform of by-election donation rules; overall reduction in spending limits by central parties in election periods; and the introduction of limits—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: And finally, the introduction of leadership and nomination campaign spending limits.

I came to the meeting with those seven reforms. I wanted to have a conversation about their perceptions of those. I still hope that we will get some substantive feedback from the leaders.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The donations to the Liberal Party included the maximum in the Sudbury by-election using the loophole they now suddenly want to close. The Premier would never propose a solution to a problem that did not exist. Nearly $30,000 in donations starting immediately after receiving a government grant sure seems like a problem to me.

How many examples do I need to raise day after day in the Legislature of these shady dealings, of these shady fundraising techniques, before the Premier supports our call for a public inquiry into her party's political fundraising?

Will the Premier give us one justification, one reason, why she doesn't want this public inquiry? Why hide from it if you have nothing that you're trying to cover up?

Interjections.

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

The leader will withdraw.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear. As far back as last June, I said that we needed to move on the changes for funding donations—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Essex, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've brought forward a proposal and, on top of the substantial changes, I've said that we need to have a process that will allow public input from across the province.

I suggested to the leaders yesterday, and to the leader of the Green Party today, that we bring draft legislation forward this spring and that we send that draft legislation to committee after first reading rather than after second reading. That allows the whole summer for consultation around the province and then another round of consultation after second reading.

This morning, the leader of the Green Party said that it might be a good idea for the House leaders to talk about how to maximize the input in those committee hearings. My experience on committee was that the discussion was truncated. I think it would be a good discussion for the House leaders to have on how we could maximize the input from the public as part of those committee hearings.

1120

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. This morning, my children and youth services critic, the MPP for Hamilton Mountain, was joined by Dr. James Porter, Kristen Ellison and Heather Bourdon. They came to Queen's Park along with hundreds of other parents to sound the alarm about this Premier's decision to take away essential therapy from kids with autism over the age of five.

They told heartbreaking stories of waiting for years, only to learn that their children will now never receive access to those services. We heard about the negative long-term impacts of this government's decision to create a lost generation of kids with autism spectrum disorder. All children with ASD deserve better from a Premier who once claimed, "Every Ontarian with autism deserves our support and has mine."

My question is a simple one: Can the Premier look up to all of these families in the gallery and tell them why she doesn't think their kids are worth the investment?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Children and Youth Services is going to want to comment on this, but I can look into the eyes of every one of the parents here and say that I don't want your children languishing on a wait-list indefinitely. I want your children to get intensive service. I want your children to have access to the services that are going to help them. That's why we're making these changes, because I, unlike the NDP, am not willing to have those kids languish on a wait-list.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. A reminder on all sides that the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A reminder on all sides that the debate—start the clock—is through the Chair. There's a reason for that, and you know what it is. Stay to it, please.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm sure they would respond that what they don't want is for the Premier to kick their kids off the waiting list.

Liberal members need to imagine what they would do if this decision was impacting their children: knowing that there is intervention available that could help your

child communicate to the outside world and hearing, after years of waiting, that your child will finally access this service, then having the rug pulled out from under you. With the stroke of this Premier's pen, your child will never receive access to those services. What would you do? Would you fight for your child? You absolutely would. Liberal members have a duty to fight for all children with autism spectrum disorder. They need to tell the Premier and the minister to stand up for kids.

So, again, I ask this Premier: Tell the parents today that are here why their kids don't deserve this life-changing therapy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's why we're putting $330 million into creating a new Ontario autism program: $330 million more because children are languishing on waiting lists, because children need intensive therapy, because there is a continuum of therapy that is needed, because we need to make sure that children come off the waiting list and get immediate support—which is what the $8,000 is—and then have access to a new intensive program that will allow them to get the service that they need. That is a far better situation than a situation where a child is sitting on a waiting list not getting the therapy and the window for when that intensive therapy would be successful is closing. I am not willing, as the Premier, to allow that window to close on thousands of children. They need that therapy. That's why we're putting this program in place.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals have promised changes to services in autism spectrum disorder for 14 years, since I was the critic of children and youth services in this House. Fourteen years ago they promised that they would put services in schools to help these kids, and the services are not there today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The members will come to order.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So it is not surprising, then, that the families in this room and elsewhere across this province do not trust this Liberal government for one minute that their kids are going to see the services that they need. The bottom line is: Clearing the list to put out a headline that you don't have a list anymore is not the right way to treat children with autism in this province.

This Premier needs to step up to the plate and promise these kids who are currently on the list that they will be grandfathered into any new system and get the autism services, the IBI therapy, that they need to be able to communicate with the outside world. Will she step up and do the right thing?

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me.

Now, to the minister.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. I'm glad to have the opportunity to answer questions in front of the parents who are here today.

Speaker, I know that change is difficult for families. I know that first-hand. I know—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to ask and advise our guests that while we want you here, any displays are not allowed from the public gallery. I would appreciate it if you resisted doing so.

Minister.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I know that this change affects a number of families across the province, in addition to the families and the children that are here today.

We are changing the program because we are following the best scientific evidence. In addition to 330 million new dollars, we are creating 16,000 new spaces for children to get those critical interventions when they need it the most.

That's why we are working very hard to reach out to parents. We are holding webinars. We started one last night, and we had over 500 parents participating. We have four more webinars to come.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier said yesterday that her plan to change political fundraising was "non-partisan" and that she wanted to work with the other parties. But then she told the media that she actually wrote this plan by herself, at her dining room table, on the weekend.

To add to that, she wants any consultation to happen—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To add to that, she wants any consultation to happen on a committee, with a Liberal majority, where the Liberal Party can outvote anything that the Premier doesn't like when it comes to amendments.

Does this Premier honestly believe that's a process that the people of Ontario will respect and have confidence in?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said to the Leader of the Opposition, I did prepare for the meeting with the leaders. I prepared a set of proposals, looking at the regimes in other jurisdictions, looking at the commentary that had been made in the public, and I brought those proposals to my meeting with the leaders. I would expect that anyone going into an important meeting would prepare for that meeting.

I was quite prepared to hear substantive proposals coming from the other side, coming from the opposition

leaders. There were a number of questions that I put on the table, Mr. Speaker, and I made it clear to the leaders of the opposition parties, as I did to the leader of the Green Party this morning, that in the committee process that we are proposing, we would bring draft legislation forward this spring. We would send that legislation, with agreement of the House, to the committee after first reading, as opposed to second reading, so that there would be two rounds of consultations around the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: At any given time, this Premier has dozens of expert advisory panels on the go. There were panels whose job it was to study the reports made by other panels. But when it comes to ensuring that people can trust the basic fairness of our democracy, this Premier is refusing to establish a fast-moving, non-partisan and transparent panel.

Can the Premier explain, when it comes to an issue of such import as how election campaigns are funded, why she's refusing the input of a non-partisan expert panel that includes political parties, civil society and NGOs?

1130

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: A couple of things on this: First of all, I believe that there is a fair degree of consensus on where we need to go. As I said, when I met with the leader of the Green Party this morning, the suggestions that he brought forward were very much in sync with the proposal that I had brought to the leaders of the opposition parties. Now, I don't know where the leaders of the opposition parties stand substantially on some of these things because they weren't willing to engage with me in a substantial discussion.

I believe that the process of a standing committee, having two rounds of consultation around the province—we've committed to inviting the Chief Electoral Officer as the first government delegate. I said to the leader of the Green Party this morning that we would ask him to come as the second delegate to the committee, once the draft legislation got to that process.

I believe that there is ample opportunity between now and into the fall for everyone who wants to weigh in on this to do so, and for us to make sure we get the best piece of legislation possible.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier insists that there's a broad public consensus for a plan that she wrote by herself at her table over the weekend. Can she tell Ontarians, perhaps, what public meetings on campaign financing—

Interjections.

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

Leader?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Can she tell Ontarians what public meetings on campaign financing she's attended? How many Ontarians has she consulted with? Which NGOs, which academics and which civil society groups made submissions to her in the development of her at-home-table document that she provided?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I'm not willing to do: I'm not willing to delay this process by layering on process and the creation of new committees. We have a completely legitimate process. In fact, it's the definition of the democratic process that this Legislative Assembly draft legislation and that we do that in consultation with people around the province. We do that, and then we send that draft legislation to consultation.

What the leader of the third party is proposing is that another process be put in place, after which legislation would be drafted, after which there would be consultation. So in order to get changes in place by the beginning of January 2017—that would be impossible. That is what the leader of the third party is proposing. We're not willing to do that.

I think there's been a lot of discussion. There needs to be more, but it needs to be on a substantial set of proposals. I'd like to get moving on that.

Interjections.

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

New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week, I shared stories from families that are devastated because of your decision to stop providing IBI therapy to children over five years old. Some of those families have joined us here today and are looking to you for answers.

One family shared their story about their son, John Paul. In October 2015, one month prior to turning five, John Paul finally began IBI therapy after waiting for nearly three years. Prior to receiving IBI therapy, he wasn't able to say a word. Now, after a couple of months, he's using sentences. Now the minister will be stripping away this IBI support for John Paul and other children just because they're five. John Paul's experience clearly shows that IBI is working.

Will the minister do the right thing and reverse her decision and allow children over the age of five access to IBI therapy?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank my critic from the opposition party for this very important question and, again, acknowledge the families that are here today. These parents here today, and others across the province and on our webinar last night with hundreds of parents, have heard me say that the clinical experts have advised us that intensive intervention is most effective for children under five. That means that children over five are not in the right developmental window for this service.

To help families with children over the age of five who are currently waiting for services, we are providing them with one-time funding of $8,000. That will take children off the waiting list today and into immediate

service. Parents can buy the service immediately and the children will not have to wait. Once that money is spent, families can access or improve upon publicly funded autism services. It will continue to provide more service for a longer duration, tailored to the children's needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Webinars where you try to justify your decision are not what these parents are looking for. They want therapy for their kids.

I want to quote from another letter I received from a parent. He wrote, "It's unfortunate autism isn't given the same priority as cancer. Both do not have a cure. Both cost money to treat and manage. And both can be devastating for the families....

"Whenever you're going to talk about limited funding for autism treatment, try replacing the word 'autism' with 'cancer' and read it for yourself. How does it sound? What would the reaction be if you read that statement in public?"

I agree. We would never push aside a cancer patient based on age, yet this is exactly what the minister is doing with children with ASD.

Will the minister reverse her decision and provide real support to the thousands of Ontario children waiting for IBI therapy today?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, I thank the member for the question. It's very important.

I know what it's like to have a child with special needs. When I was asked, as parliamentary assistant to then Minister of Children and Youth Services, to write the special-needs report, it was my honour and privilege to talk to families with special needs, with all kinds of disabilities, to help them get the information they needed, to help them navigate a far-too-complicated system, to help them figure out what the best evidence is, to help them determine when a diagnosis is appropriate, to help them get the services they needed. This is the most important piece of work I've ever done, Speaker.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you.

As Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services, my job is to advocate and support and protect children. My job is to follow the evidence and provide the best possible—

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

Interjections.

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

New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. We have hundreds of parents here today who told us that they are mourning the death of their children's potential due to this government's decision. It's unacceptable that kids who waited because of this government's misplaced priorities are now being forced to pay the price again. This government is failing kids and families with ASD. This government is pulling the rug out from families who were about to receive that very important therapy. They deserve better. This shouldn't be about money. This should be about kids and their well-being.

Will the Premier do the right thing and ensure that kids who were on the wait-list will be grandfathered into the program?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a gut-wrenching issue. I think it's obvious that there is huge emotional investment by every one of the families here and the thousands of families across the province.

I've been the Minister of Education. I worked with the then Minister of Children and Youth Services. We made changes in the autism program. The demographics have changed. There are more children who are born with autism, who are born on the spectrum. We have to continue to change the program so that it meets the needs of the kids who are in our society. We need to make sure that children don't languish on a wait-list.

What really worries me about what the opposition parties are proposing is that—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, it really does because what it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier?

1140

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is unacceptable to me that we would allow a situation to continue that allows children to languish on a wait-list and get no service. That is unacceptable. We're not going to let that continue.

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, what's unacceptable is that this Premier is doing that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to acknowledge you first.

Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. This government created the wait-list by not investing in children with ASD. Now children over five are going to pay the price for this government's mistake, and that's unacceptable.

We had experts here today who told the government very clearly about their failures. These families travelled from all over the province to make their voices heard. Will the Premier listen to them today? Will she look at families today and tell them that she will do the right thing and grandfather children over the age of five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I say to the families here is that we need to get this right. We need 16,000 more kids to get service, and we need every child—every child—with autism to get the services that they need. There is a continuum of intensity that is needed, Mr. Speaker.

What we're doing is providing money immediately so that parents can buy those services, but that's not the end of it. The continuum is that they then will be able to get into the new program, which will provide a range of intense programming. That's what the ABA service is.

I want every child in this province to have the right services. I don't want them languishing on wait-lists. I don't want them to miss that window of opportunity where services will be most successful. That's why we're making these changes. That's why we're making this very important investment.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I explained before, there can be no outbursts at all. I'm going to ask the person to leave, please.

If anyone else continues, I'll have sections of galleries removed. Please, no demonstrations.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. As we discussed this morning, there are many families that are here with us in the Legislature. While many of these families, and families in my riding of Ottawa South, initially welcomed the government's announcement to provide $333 million in new funding for autism services, many of these parents feel betrayed and confused about how this funding will be used and what impact these changes will have on their children.

I know, and we've heard this morning, that they're particularly concerned about children over the age of five and about what will happen to their children, some of whom have been on a waiting list for many, many years.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform this House about whether we will be discontinuing services for children with autism over the age of five?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the member from Ottawa South for the important question.

There has been confusion about the improvements that we're making to autism services in Ontario. I want to be crystal clear: The government is absolutely not discontinuing services for children with autism who are over the age of five. We're focusing on the scientific evidence; we're focusing on what the experts tell us is the best outcome for all children on the autism spectrum.

What we are doing is getting children—

Interjection.

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

Carry on.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: What we are doing is providing those families with one-time funding of $8,000, and when that money is spent, they'll enter into an improved autism program that's based on the latest science. The new program will provide services to children over the age of five that are intensive, available for a longer period of time and, most importantly, tailored to the individual child's needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm encouraged to hear that we will be continuing to support children over the age of five, and that these children will receive services immediately.

I would like to assure the leader of the third party that members on this side of the House, as well as on all sides of this House, advocate for families with autism. I want to make sure that that's clear to her. Don't try to take ownership of that.

In the interest of getting the information that people need, can the minister please explain to us, lay out to us, the program that will continue to support older children with autism coming forward in Ontario, the new Ontario Autism Program?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, thank you to the member for the important question.

There are a few points I want to make. First, the new program will be simpler to access. We know it hasn't been the easiest system to navigate.

There won't be two different streams, Speaker. Over time, there will be one stream. When a child enters the program, a clinician will assess their particular developmental needs. Each child's program will be tailored to meet those needs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: —regardless of their age. While the new program—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right after I asked her, she continues. The member from Hamilton Mountain, second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Mr. Speaker, while the new program won't be called IBI any longer, children of any age who need those more intensive interventions will receive the level of intensity they need, delivered better than it was under the old program.

It also means 16,000 more children will have access to services. Within two years, the wait times for services will be cut in half, and I hope we'll get it down to six months by 2021.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Premier. The ongoing state of emergency in Attawapiskat is more than alarming. When listening to first-hand accounts of the challenges of life on-reserve, and the mental health struggles the community is facing, you would hardly believe that such conditions could exist

in Ontario. Speaker, would the Premier explain what is being done to assist the community of Attawapiskat at this time of crisis?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, this is a very tragic situation. What has happened with the situation is that yesterday there was an emergency response team from Ontario that arrived in Attawapiskat at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It consists of a team of mental health experts, youth specialists and other mental health workers. They're doing an immediate assessment of the situation.

In addition to that, the Mushkegowuk tribal council has a health response team that also has responded to Attawapiskat, which, of course, is on James Bay. In addition to that, on Sunday the federal government sent in a couple of experts to deal with this crisis.

On Wednesday, the Ontario Minister of Health and the Minister of Children and Youth Services are going to Attawapiskat, where they will receive an assessment from the experts that are there today. From there, we will proceed to a long-term—

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Again, through you, Speaker, to the Premier: I commend the government for sending resources immediately. It's the right thing to do. But this is the fifth state of emergency that the community of Attawapiskat has declared in the past 10 years. Systemic issues with inadequate housing, flood control, access to clean drinking water and sub-par education resources have plagued the community. Sadly, these issues stretch well beyond one isolated First Nation reserve on the James Bay coast.

Speaker, would the Premier explain how we can break this cycle of crisis, ensure that the current efforts have a lasting impact, and provide hope for young people growing up in Attawapiskat and other remote First Nations communities?

Hon. David Zimmer: Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Together with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, I am going to Attawapiskat tomorrow morning. We're going to be joined on that trip by the national chief, Perry Bellegarde, who represents our Assembly of First Nations, as well as the regional chief, Isadore Day, who is the health representative for AFN in this province.

1150

I have to say that I and all of us on the government side, and I think all of us in the Legislature, were absolutely devastated when we heard the news of the 11 suicide attempts that occurred on Saturday alone. Ten out of those 11 were young people.

I have to say that we're working extremely well, and closely, not only with First Nations but with the federal government, and that change in the relationship has been welcomed by all parties, I think,. I know that in 2012, Patrick Brown's government closed the National Aboriginal Health Organization—

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

New question.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. This weekend, the Premier sat at home and wrote a plan that's going to impact the democracy of over 14 million Ontarians. This change is presumably going to take some lengthy legislation to actually enact. The Premier has promised to bring forward this legislation by May. That's only three weeks away.

My question is, how much of the work had already begun on this legislation before the Premier actually sat down with the leaders of the NDP and the PCs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've explained, I was preparing for an important meeting with the leaders of the opposition parties. I was looking at the rules in other jurisdictions, I was looking at the issues that had been raised in the public discussion and I was preparing to bring forward some proposals and to ask some questions of the leaders of the opposition.

Actually, I would have expected that the leaders of the opposition parties would have been doing the same thing, that they would have been preparing for a meeting and preparing for a substantial conversation.

In any case, the legislation has not yet been drafted. It is in process. We propose that we bring legislation forward in the spring. I hope that I will hear from the leaders of the opposition, as I have heard from the leader of the Green Party, on what their substantial input might be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We already know that during the budget process, the Liberals had already drafted the budget before the pre-budget consultations had been completed. We know that the Premier clearly does not agree with the principle of consulting first and writing legislation afterwards.

Now, with this issue, it seems that we have the same result again. The Premier has already indicated that some of the process has already begun on the drafting of this legislation, so this was done before the Premier has consulted with anyone else, before consulting with non-partisan experts, before consulting with party leaders of other political parties, before consulting with civil society and before consulting with Ontarians in general.

My question is this: How much of the process has already been completed, which you just indicated? How much of the legislation has already been completed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're certainly hearing a critique on the process, but let's talk about the substance. The Premier has put forward a number of proposals, and I think we need to actually talk about the substance.

Do they believe that we need to reform third-party advertising rules and have maximum spending limits on third-party advertising? Yes or no?

Do the opposition parties agree that we should ban union donations and ban corporate donations? Yes or no?

Do the opposition parties believe that we need to reduce the maximum amount for donations? Yes or no?

Speaker, do they believe that we need to have constraints on loans and loan guarantees? Yes or no?

Do they believe that we need to reform the by-election donation rules? Yes or no?

We have substantive proposals. We want the input from the opposition. We would like to know what—

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

New question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is for the Minister of Energy. This government has been dedicated to making decisions that benefit Ontario and Ontarians, now and in the future. When you look at the proposals in the 2016 budget introduced last week, this mandate is very clear. The government is continuing to be a leader by taking action on climate change and investing in an electricity system that is clean and reliable.

Constituents in Brampton–Springdale that I represent have questions about the makeup of our energy system. They are often surprised and very pleased to learn that 90% of energy generated in Ontario is greenhouse gas emission-free. This impressive statistic is our reality in Ontario due to the serious commitment and leadership from this government.

Minister, can you please share the details of how investing in clean electricity infrastructure will benefit our province?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member from Brampton–Springdale for the question.

Our government is continuing to enhance the electricity sector to improve ratepayer and customer experience. We were the first jurisdiction in North America to eliminate coal-fired electricity and, since 2003, have invested more than $34 billion in clean energy and more reliable transmission.

We're moving forward with major nuclear refurbishment at Darlington and Bruce Power with an affordable average price into the grid of about 7.7 cents per kilowatt hour, all 100% emissions-free. Refurbishment is estimated to create nearly $10 billion in annual economic activity and create 60,000 jobs over the period. Continued operations at Pickering will avoid eight million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and save electricity consumers over $600 million annually.

There's a lot more, Mr. Speaker, and I'll speak to that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Thank you to the minister for explaining the significant value that these investments in clean energy have had and will have. Ontario's participation in the low-carbon economy is key to remaining part of the leader pack of jurisdictions that excel at modernization and innovation.

While these efforts to move further toward a low-carbon economy through the cap-and-trade initiative must be a priority, with change brings questions about how people and business will adapt. As this government has clarified many times, electricity rates will not increase due to cap-and-trade, since Ontario has designed an electricity system that is almost entirely GHG-free. Beyond this, the government has also introduced several initiatives to mitigate the costs that consumers have to pay for clean, reliable electricity.

Minister, can you please share with the House how your ministry is working on managing the cost of electricity for consumers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have introduced a number of measures to help ratepayers manage their electricity costs. We removed the debt retirement charge off all residential bills, with commercial and industrial users coming off in April 2018.

We introduced the Ontario energy support program for low- and middle-income households, saving qualifying families $430 annually when combined with the debt retirement charge. For small businesses, we've introduced a five-point energy savings plan, providing the tools for small and medium businesses to conserve and save on their energy costs.

We expanded the industrial conservation initiative, encouraging more of Ontario's largest energy users to reduce their electricity use during peak periods. Since July 2015, more than 280 additional companies have been added and are saving 25% on their electricity bills through this expanded conservation program.

Our work to support ratepayers is working, and we're determined to continue.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Late last week, the National Post exposed a secret report on the nearly $5 billion a year Ontario spends on business subsidies. This report concluded, "Ontario's business support programs favour the largest and oldest companies, the companies least likely to be in need of support."

The Auditor General has already confirmed that companies are hand-picked by the Liberal government to receive grants, and the government doesn't even track the results of the nearly $5 billion spent per year. I've been calling on the Minister of Economic Development since January to make public all past grants, and I'm still waiting.

So my question this morning is simple: Will the Premier make public all grants handed out to private companies under the Liberal government? If not, what is she hiding?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We're happy to share publicly all of the investments that we've made with businesses across this province. In all, we've invested $2.8 billion. That has leveraged $29 billion in private sector investment here in Ontario, rather than somewhere else in the

world. That's 160,000 Ontarians whose jobs have either been created or supported as a result of these investments.

The question I think Ontarians need to ask is where does the member's leader stand on this? Does he stand with his critic, who we know is a philosophically challenged critic on these issues? Or does he stand where he used to stand when he was an MP in Ottawa? I have pictures with the Leader of the Opposition—which I won't show, Mr. Speaker—in Barrie at an IBM investment, just like all the other investments we've made, where he's praising the investments we've made. Where does the leader stand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Supplementary?

1200

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm glad that the government has finally acknowledged and agreed that they will present the list. We just want to know when this list will be exposed and where we can find it.

Of the $5 billion per year in business support programs, we know that the largest and most successful companies across Ontario receive the lion's share of this funding. We also know that the Ministry of Economic Development has no idea whether the money being spent is actually creating jobs or helping our economy. What's more, much of that money was spent with no public application process, and instead the Minister of Economic Development and the Premier hand-pick companies that would receive the payouts behind closed doors by invitation only.

There's a shockingly high number of Liberal Party donors who have also received corporate welfare. Will the Premier clear the air and tell us which companies were invited to apply for this money and why? Did she simply use a list of Liberal Party donors? Or will it take a public inquiry?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think Ontarians are getting very curious about where the Leader of the Opposition stands on the $2.8 billion that we've invested to accrue $29 billion in private sector investment and create or support 160,000 jobs.

I'm going to send over a great picture of the Leader of the Opposition holding a ribbon we were cutting in Barrie for one of those investments. This is what he had to say that day: "The advanced knowledge coming from the collaborative research and innovation platform funded by our government"—he's referring to the federal—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry can move chairs, but I'm still going to get you.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let me finish the quote. The Leader of the Opposition goes on to say, "This will be a strategic asset for Canada to advance homegrown innovation on the world stage."

We're building up our innovation, we're building up companies, we're creating jobs, and we'll do so with or without the—

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

New question.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. As we know, budget 2016 again squandered the Liberal government's chance to be a leader on child care. Worst of all, its new child care regulations put our youngest children with much older children and fewer staff. Apparently, this government believes that a 12-month-old child is a toddler. The Premier and her government are failing families in Ontario. Parents, particularly women, are being forced to halt re-entering the workforce because they can't find a child care space. Speaker, can the minister explain why, in 2016, the government does not have a child care policy?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Well, in fact, we have a very extensive child care policy. We have consulted broadly with the sector. We have gotten rid of the old Day Nurseries Act—dramatically out of date—introduced a new Child Care and Early Years Act, which not only clarifies the regulations around licensed child care but puts into place a whole host of new laws and regulations, making child care in the unregulated home care sector much safer for parents. We have done more policy work on developing child care and early years policies than any other government in the last 30 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Child care providers, professionals in the sector and parents have all said that they do not support the regulation changes. And I need to point out that in the 2016 budget there is no money for child care. So much for a Premier and a minister who promised to make child care a priority

My question is back to the minister: How long does it take to make a priority reality? Parents in Ontario are paying the highest child care costs in the country. Lists for subsidized care just keep getting longer. Hopefully they don't just start kicking people off, like they have with autism. Our most vulnerable families are struggling to ensure their children have access to quality, affordable child care. We know that the federal government isn't guaranteeing that provinces will get the funding that they promised. Can the minister confirm that Ontario will get the money for child care their friends in the federal government promised, yes or no?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, what I can speak to is our government's record on funding child care.

Since 2003-04, our government has doubled child care funding to more than $1 billion annually. In 2016—this year—the ministry is providing over $1.05 billion to 47 municipalities. That's an increase in funding of over $16 million since last year, so the money continues to go up.

In addition to that, we are investing $269 million over three years to subsidize the wages of our workers in the

child care sector. We started last year with a $1-an-hour subsidy. This year, it goes to $2 an hour. In the licensed home care sector, it is goes from a $10-a-day subsidy to a $20-a-day subsidy.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues, a dedicated and committed public servant with whom we are all proud to serve.

As the minister is aware, I was proud to serve on the Legislature's Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment. Our government has taken concrete action, including introducing legislation to improve supports for survivors and to address sexual violence and harassment on campuses across Ontario.

I'm proud to say that I have a group here from my riding today who are participating in the Equal Voice Girls Government program. The Rolling Meadows elementary school grade 8 girls' leadership group is here, along with their passionate and dedicated teachers, Tanya Ferro and Sandra Lumsden. I visited the school recently and learned that, while they're here, they've chosen to speak to Ontario's sexual violence and harassment action plan. Their presentation will focus on the need for enhanced information in the curriculum on issues like consent and on the #WhoWillYouHelp ads, seen by over 85 million people.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please inform the House about some of the ways the Women's Directorate supports survivors of sexual violence and harassment?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Burlington for her important question. I also want to thank her for her work on the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

I also want say thanks and hello to all the students who are here for Girls' Government. Members from all parties today have brought in girls from grades 6 to 8 for Girls Government day. It's fantastic.

Our sexual violence and harassment action plan and the related social media campaign have reached more than 84 million people. I'm so pleased that we were able to pass Bill 132 with the support of all parties.

More recently, we launched Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence against Indigenous Women. That's a $100-million investment to implement that strategy.

Thanks to our Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign, more than 34,000 front-line professionals and service providers have received training to help detect domestic violence and to support victims.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer and for her leadership on these important issues.

Ontario is leading the way when it comes to addressing sexual violence and harassment against women, but I know that the minister's portfolio also includes priorities beyond the important violence-against-women work that she does. The minister responsible for women's issues has repeatedly taken leadership on many issues that affect young women in Ontario, and I know that young women across this province appreciate her dedication.

Would the minister please inform the House, including the young women from my riding here today, about the programs that she oversees in the Ontario Women's Directorate that are focused on providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to achieve a brighter future?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Indeed, our government has taken steps to increase women's economic participation in a number of ways in our society. Ontario is the first Canadian jurisdiction to introduce the "comply or explain" amendments, which came into effect in December of 2014. Because of these regulations, companies listed on the TSX are now required to report publicly on their approach to increasing the number of women on their boards.

The Women's Directorate has a great micro-lending program, helping low-income women build and grow their own business. I've been up north and seen some of those programs in action. They're fantastic. It's providing more than 1,400 low-income women with the skills they need to start up and run a successful business.

We also have the Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program, which provides women with specialized supports. More than 3,000 women have participated in this program. So we're very committed to improving—

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

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROSS BATTEN

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'd like to acknowledge today the passing of one of Whitby–Oshawa's great constituents, Ross Batten.

Ross was born on July 5, 1944, and spent much of his life in Ashburn, Ontario, just north of downtown Whitby. It's a hamlet in the northern portion of my riding.

Ross distinguished himself in the community as a town of Whitby councillor for 13 years, and as a region of Durham councillor for three years, as well. In addition to his presidency of the Kinsmen Club of Brooklin and District, Ross served for 15 years as a director, and then chairperson, of the Whitby Hydro Electric Corp.

Former MP and Whitby resident Judi Longfield said that Ross was always well-prepared for business meetings and was consistently fair in his examination of the issues that came before the board in his capacity as the chairperson of the planning and development committee at the town of Whitby. He always viewed the big picture

and constantly acted in the best interests of the stakeholders and the constituents that he served so well.

Gerry Emm, a former regional councillor that I served with and a good friend of Ross's, told me about a lighter moment in his political life. Gerry and Ross were partners in a boat-building and race-across-the-harbour challenge during Whitby's Harbour Day festival many years ago. After constructing a boat and successfully practising on a placid pond in Ashburn, where Gerry and Ross both lived, the actual event in the harbour was anything but placid. The twosome did not fare so well when confronted with winds and high waves in the bay of Whitby harbour. Their boat turned into a submarine very quickly that day.

Ross Batten was truly a kind and decent man. Our thoughts go out to his wife, Diane; children, Bradley and Deborah; his sister, Judy; his grandsons, Ryan and Craig; and his great-grandson, Lucas. A community leader, a planner for a better future within the town of Whitby and the region of Durham, and a proud father, Ross Batten will be recalled fondly.

PARAMEDICS COMPETITION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Allow me to brag for a moment about a team of four Ontario paramedics who are training for an international competition next month in the Czech Republic. Thirty other teams from around the world will be there. It's a gruelling competition: It takes place over 24 straight hours, starting at 6 in the morning; the teams are thrown into a dozen life-and-death situations.

Only two teams from Canada were invited to compete. One is from BC; they are last year's international champions. Team Ontario members come from Windsor and Essex county. Captain Chris Kirwan comes from my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh. He is joined by Lance Huver, Nick Montaleone and Slav Pulcer. Mr. Pulcer is from my riding as well, while Mr. Huver lives in Amherstburg, and Mr. Montaleone is a resident of LaSalle; both towns are in the riding of Essex.

Mr. Kirwan is only 27, a graduate of the paramedic program at Windsor's St. Clair College, as are two of the other team members. Team captain Kirwan will be graduating from the University of Windsor this spring with a bachelor of science degree. They are all extraordinary young men.

I think it's great that Canada has an Ontario paramedic team in this international competition. As I said, it's in the Czech Republic and you can "Czech out" the two Canadian teams at teamcanadaeastwest.com.

ROYAL ST. GEORGE'S COLLEGE STUDENT PROJECTS

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to recognize and celebrate the achievement of Royal St. George's College and their students, as they recently held their Foundation Year Projects.

The Foundation Year Projects challenged grade 9 Royal St. George's College students to address social and environmental issues in our community. Students learned about the principles of social entrepreneurship and applied them to the creation of innovative solutions that addressed an issue of their choosing.

The resulting student-led initiatives included a children's book that aimed to combat racism in schools; an online educational resource hub for at-risk youth; a program to recycle used milk bags into a waterproof sleeping mat for the homeless; and the creation of a podcast that focused on increasing youth engagement in politics.

I'm very impressed with the innovation and creativity of these students. Their ability to identify these issues in our community and create solutions is truly remarkable. I commend the students at Royal St. George's College for their hard work and courage for taking on important social issues.

PERTH COUNTY FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: On Friday, April 1, the Perth County Federation of Agriculture held its annual federal-provincial forum. It has been an honour to attend the forum each and every year since I was first elected in 2011.

This year was no exception. Representatives from the PCFA, commodity and farm groups presented their ideas and concerns. I want to highlight just a few:

—the need to better support rural infrastructure;

—skyrocketing energy costs, and how the government's cap-and-trade will push fuel costs even higher above our competitors';

—the social licence to farm, and the need to bridge the knowledge gap among those without a farming background;

—a regulatory system too often influenced by special interests or political pressure, rather than science; and

—farmers' success in reducing carbon emissions by producing more with much less than they did in the past. For that, they don't get the credit they deserve.

I want to share an important statistic, which we heard at the forum from PCFA president Joanne Foster. In Ontario, there are 158,000 jobs in the farm sector, representing $8.1 billion in wages and salaries, and 58% of these jobs are in rural areas. Let's never lose sight of just how important this industry is to communities across the province.

I want to thank Joanne, as well as Agnes Denham and everyone at the PCFA, for organizing the annual forum.

KOREY JARVIS

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today, I would like to highlight a young man from Elliot Lake who is about to have his dream finally come true.

Twenty-nine-year-old Korey Jarvis recently qualified to compete for Team Canada in wrestling at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Jarvis

competed in the Canadian trials in Edmonton in December, defeating a Venezuelan wrestler to win a spot on Team Canada.

Jarvis began his wrestling career in grade 9 at Elliot Lake Secondary School. After high school, he moved to Guelph, where he continued to practise his sport. He made Team Canada and began competing on the international circuit.

What is most remarkable about Jarvis is his passion, dedication and perseverance despite several challenges. This was the third time that Jarvis has tried out for the Olympic team. In both 2008 and 2012, he came in third and needed a second-place finish in order to secure a place on the team. Jarvis did not give up and continued to train and compete, and now he has officially secured a place on the Canadian Olympic team.

As one can imagine, the time and dedication to a sport can be a very costly endeavour. To help Korey with these costs, please see my Facebook page for contact information.

As MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, I can say that we are so proud of you, Korey, for your past accomplishments, and there will be a city, a riding, a province and a country behind you, cheering.

Best of luck to you, Korey. Now go kick some butt, Algoma–Manitoulin style.

KITCHENER RANGERS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Madam Chair, I often stand before you and members of this House to share news with you about great initiatives and events that are happening in my riding of Kitchener Centre. But today, I want to alert you to a remarkable event that's going to happen right here in the Ontario Legislature—that's with your approval, of course—and that is that the Deputy Premier will soon be wearing the red, white and blue of the Kitchener Rangers.

1510

Tonight marks the third game in the OHL western conference semifinals between the Kitchener Rangers and the London Knights. To mark this occasion, the member from London North Centre and I have made a little wager. The losing representative is going to have to wear the opposing team's jersey at the end of the series.

Madam Speaker, I'm feeling pretty confident in this wager. How could I not? The Rangers have made it to the Memorial Cup tournament six times. They've won seven division titles. Over the years, the Rangers have had 145 alumni who have played in the NHL, five among them elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame, with such names as Bill Barber, Larry Robinson and Scott Stevens. Tonight, we're going to see the Rangers face off against the Knights again, this time in the great city of Kitchener.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to continuing this friendly discussion of the Rangers' supremacy over social media with the minister from London; too bad she's not here right now.

I hope that you will join me in cheering on these teams in the coming weeks. Go Rangers.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Last Friday, I had the privilege of meeting with past and present students, as well as their families, from Huron–Bruce who are fully supportive of both Robarts and Amethyst demonstration schools. It was heart-wrenching, listening to them and having them plead to us to make sure that the government opens their ears and hearts as to why this type of school is so, so important to grade 7 and 8 students throughout Ontario.

There was a footnote to it: They feel absolutely appalled that this government has chosen to cap enrolment, to wither down the number of students at the school. It reminded me very much of what happened with the Bluewater youth detention centre. It was exactly the same thing.

Most importantly, I want to leave some quotes with everyone in the House today. Rosie is an amazing little grade 7. She feels that Amethyst is building her confidence and her hope. Another student actually said, "It's important that the Premier realizes that I may sit in a room full of classmates, but I feel alone because I have to learn differently." That is not inclusion. They want to be amongst their peers, so that they can learn together and excel together, as opposed to being made to feel that they're different.

Ladies and gentlemen of the House, we need to do right on Thursday and support our demonstration schools in Ontario.

SILVER CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Yvan Baker: Today I rise to speak to an important issue in my riding of Etobicoke Centre. The Toronto District School Board is considering the sale of Silver Creek Public School. This is a very concerning development as the property includes green space important to our community and is home to two incredibly important organizations.

The Etobicoke Children's Centre provides invaluable services to children, youth and their families who experience challenges related to mental health and autism, and serves over 1,000 children and their families every year.

Silver Creek Pre-School serves approximately 70 children, most of whom have severe special needs. These services are vital to some of our most vulnerable children in our community and we must protect them.

I've been working closely with members of the local community, including the Friends of Silver Creek School and the Richmond Gardens Ratepayers and Residents Association, the leaders of Etobicoke Children's Centre and Silver Creek Pre-School, as well as our local councillor and TDSB trustee, to find a solution. I have met with TDSB representatives and spoken in our community and in this Legislature to advocate for the protection of these services. I've also been working with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to advocate for Silver Creek and determine what the provincial government can do.

I'm pleased to report that this has led to the government of Ontario responding to the TDSB in writing to express initial interest in the Silver Creek property. Essentially, the provincial government has stepped up and shown a strong desire to protect these crucial services within our community. Although there is still a lot of work to be done, this is certainly a step in the right direction.

I rise in the House today to thank the Friends of Silver Creek School and to thank members of my community for their passion and dedication to this cause. Let us hope that the TDSB does not sell the Silver Creek property, but should it do so, I will continue to do everything I can to protect these essential services in Etobicoke Centre.

AHLUL-BAYT ISLAMIC EDUCATION CENTRE

Mr. John Fraser: I had hoped to rise today and speak about a wonderful event I was at on Saturday night—the World Lebanese Cultural Union—but, sadly, I rise today to express our support to the students and the families of the Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Education Centre in Ottawa. On Monday morning, students, parents and teachers arrived to discover hateful messages spray-painted on the school wall. The students at Ahlul-Bayt are young, and these messages create fear.

To the families of Ahlul-Bayt, I want you to know that my colleagues and I, on all sides of this Legislature, strongly condemn this act. It is heartening to know that the school's neighbours quickly came to show their support, and indeed, across Ottawa there have been countless expressions of support for the Ahlul-Bayt school and the families it serves.

Here in this province, our strength is diversity. It is what has built our province up. I want the families to know that we stand with you and condemn this act and any other act inspired by hate.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Introduction of bills? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say, on Girls' Government Day, it's nice to see a woman in the chair. I hope you get your suit soon.

GIRLS' GOVERNMENT DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA JOURNÉE DU GOUVERNEMENT DES FILLES

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 183, An Act to proclaim Girls' Government Day / Projet de loi 183, Loi proclamant la Journée du gouvernement des filles.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member can have a brief statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: By proclaiming April 12 in each year as Girls' Government Day, the province of Ontario will create an important opportunity for girls and their elected representatives to come together. Girls' Government Day will complement the Girls' Government program, a non-partisan initiative aimed at addressing the issue of under-representation by creating more engaged political citizens, and will promote diversity and create opportunities for girls to have greater participation in the political process.

ISMAILI CENTRE, TORONTO, AGA KHAN MUSEUM AND AGA KHAN PARK ACT (TAX RELIEF), 2016

Mr. Baker moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr43, An Act respecting the Ismaili Centre, Toronto, the Aga Khan Museum and the Aga Khan Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

LAWREN HARRIS DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE JOUR DE LAWREN HARRIS

Mr. Dong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 184, An Act to proclaim Lawren Harris Day / Projet de loi 184, Loi proclamant le Jour de Lawren Harris.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Does the member have a brief introduction of the bill?

Mr. Han Dong: The bill proclaims October 23 in each year as Lawren Harris Day.

1520

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES (COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

Mr. Paul Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance

Research Commission / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires afin de créer la Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member: Would you like to make a brief statement?

Mr. Paul Miller: This bill amends the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the social assistance research commission. The commission recommends social assistance rates and makes other recommendations about social assistance policies. The commission consists of people with expertise relevant to the commission's work.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted $2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional $137 per year starting in 2016; and

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

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with Joshua. Thanks, House leader.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I have all of these petitions from across Ontario, and they read as follows:

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to remortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more, Madam Speaker. I will give it to page Ariel to bring to the Clerk—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: —even if the minister is heckling me.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here that's addressed 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 ... 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" its progress through third reading and, finally, royal assent.

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature and—

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

AUTOMOTIVE DEALERS

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I want to thank Steve Clark for beginning this petition.

"Whereas Bill 152, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2015 is a vital tool that supports Ontario's auto sector by cutting red tape for dealers and consumers when a vehicle is purchased or leased; and

"Whereas, in 2011, the province of Ontario conducted a pilot project on in-house vehicle licensing at two new car dealerships that was well received by the participants; and

"Whereas the province of Quebec has permitted automobile dealers to conduct in-house vehicle registrations since 2003, with 700 dealers currently participating;

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

"That the government of Ontario immediately pass Bill 152 into law, to promote Ontario's auto retail sector by cutting red tape for motor vehicle dealers and consumers to save them time and money.

Speaker, I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with Sohan.

PARENTAL RECOGNITION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2006, Ontario Justice Paul Rivard ruled that the Children's Law Reform Act and the Vital Statistics Act, which govern birth registries, were 'clearly outdated,' legislative reform has not followed;

"Whereas Ontario lags behind four other provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec—that have already updated their LGBTQ parental recognition laws;

"Whereas in this province, same-sex couples—in addition to any family who does not have a conventional biological mother and father set-up at birth—are forced to either adopt or receive a declaration of parentage to attain legal protections over their children;

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

"Pass Bill 137, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and other acts with respect to parental recognition."

Of course, I agree with this. It's discriminatory otherwise. I give it to Terry to be delivered to the table.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the home inspector industry remains largely unregulated; and

"Whereas homeowners are increasingly reliant on home inspectors to make an educated home purchase; and

"Whereas the unregulated industry poses a risk to consumers;

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

"To protect consumers by regulating the home inspection industry and licensing home inspectors."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to Vanessa to bring down.

1530

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 room visits per 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

"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 this petition and I'll certainly sign it.

DENTAL CARE

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition and I want to thank Mr. Marc Brabant for signing it. It goes as follows:

"Whereas thousands of Ontarians live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

"Whereas the promised $45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

"Whereas the program was designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

"Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To do all in its power to stop the dental fund from being diverted to support other programs; and

"To fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to in need.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and pass it to Sohan to bring it down.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Granville Anderson: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario's labour and employment laws:

"—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker's age, job or sector of employment;

"—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

"—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;

"—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

"—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

"—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

"—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

"—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

"—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

"—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

"—ensure all workers are paid at least $15 an hour."

I agree with this petition and I'll affix my signature.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Steve Clark: I've got some more petitions supporting Ontario doctors, so I'll just read the final paragraph:

"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'm pleased to support this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Sabrina.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to present this petition for the first time in the House today. It's called "Ontario Needs to Fund Family-Created Housing."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's 2014 budget included a commitment to address the wait-list of more than 12,000 adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding, and some of whom have been waiting more than 20 years; and

"Whereas since the spring of 2014 the number of adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding has grown to more than 14,000; and

"Whereas there is currently no available funding to plan for a respectful transition from the family home to a home of choice in the community; and

"Whereas more than 1,450 Ontario parents over the age of 70 continue to provide primary care to their adult child; and

"Whereas currently adults with developmental disability must go on the crisis list before they receive residential funding, often resulting in a loss of choice, dignity and community; and

"Whereas family-created housing prioritizes dignity, choice and community inclusion for the resident living with disability as well as providing long-term cost savings for the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Minister of Community and Social Services to address the growing wait-list for adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding and provide stable funding opportunities for family-created housing."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Terry.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture.... Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified. Survivors too often face wait times for counselling services as our population grows....

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

"Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment's final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change...; and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining 'unfounded' cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors."

I agree with this petition, will put my initials to it and give it to page MacFarlane.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

JOBS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT LA CRÉATION D'EMPLOIS POUR AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Sousa moved third reading 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): I recognize Mr. Sousa.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016 Ontario budget builds on the progress our government has made over the past eight years. Since the global recession of 2009, we have remained firm in our commitment to improve the provincial economy and to protect the public services that many Ontarians rely on.

In the 2015 budget, we established the four pillars that guide us on our journey to balance budgets. This four-part plan rests on (1) investing in people's talents and skills; (2) investment in public infrastructure; (3) creating the conditions to support innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses; and (4) building a secure retirement savings plan.

In the 2016 budget, we continue to implement our plan. We've created a climate for business and investment that is one of the most competitive in North America by keeping our taxes competitive, by cutting the marginal effective tax rate on new business investment in half and by eliminating regulatory red tape.

These measures are working. Since 2009, our businesses and entrepreneurs have helped create more than 600,000 net new jobs. The vast majority of these jobs are full-time and in industries that pay above-average wages.

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For the last two years, we've attracted more foreign direct investment than any other Canadian province or US state. Those investments have also created jobs for Ontarians, and Ontario is getting ready to create an additional 320,000 more jobs by the end of 2019. That would bring Ontario's total job creation to more than 900,000 in just 10 years.

We know from experience, however, that the global economy can turn very quickly. Right now, the economic uncertainty outside of Ontario is providing favourable conditions for Ontario. A low dollar, low oil prices and steady US demand all favour Ontario exports. But we can't simply stand idle and hope these conditions will continue to favour Ontario. We must make our own future.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, is a part of our plan to do just that—a plan devised after consultations with the people of Ontario, who let us know what was most important to them—their values and their priorities. Over eight weeks, 1,732 ideas were shared; 53,402 votes were cast; 4,340 comments were made. We thank Ontarians for their input.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for their input on this important bill as well.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, is part of our plan to grow the economy and create jobs right across Ontario; to help us invest in infrastructure and in a low-carbon economy, driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses; to invest in people's talent and skills, expanding access to high-quality college and university education; to help more people get and create the jobs of the future; to help more Ontarians achieve a more secure retirement; and, of course, to balance the budget by 2017-18 and again in 2018-19.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to call on my colleague the all-wonderful, extraordinaire parliamentary assistant, Laura Albanese, to speak on some of the specific details that are proposed in this bill.

Over to you, Laura.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? She'll get an opportunity once we get a chance to go around and hear from the other members from different parties. Thank you so much.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Are they sharing?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We're sharing, yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Oh, they're sharing. Okay. Well, guess what? We now have an opportunity to hear from the member from York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by thanking Minister Sousa for his introduction and for allowing me to expand on some of the aspects of Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

Broadly speaking, this bill contains a number of new items, as well as a number of amendments to existing legislation that are aimed at supporting our plan to balance the budget in 2017-18. We will do these while we continue to invest in key public services that Ontario families rely on.

For instance, we are taking steps to make post-secondary education more affordable to students. This is why Bill 173 contains measures based on recommendations from a number of stakeholders, including student groups and the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services.

Broadly speaking, this government is proposing a redesigned student financial assistance program that would make it easier for students and their families to understand the program and to access the funds. In short, the new Ontario Student Grant provides tuition upfront in order to reduce the sticker shock that causes students to shy away from even applying to college or post-secondary education. This simplified system would include one single upfront grant for the Ontario Student Assistance Program, the Ontario Student Grant, starting in the 2017-18 school year. The OSG would replace a number of existing grants, including the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant, the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant and the Ontario Access Grant. Bill 173 includes measures to discontinue the tuition and education tax credits. The additional tax revenue from discontinuing the credits would be reinvested to support the new OSG or other post-secondary, education, training and youth job programs.

Our government wants to ensure that when people start a business in Ontario, they know that they will have access to highly skilled and talented workers. This is an advantage in the global knowledge economy.

Our government is also committed to establishing clear and consistent rules to protect Ontario consumers and drivers. With Bill 173, the government proposes amending the Insurance Act to allow for regulations to be made to help ensure that consumers are provided with complete information about the automobile insurance claims repair history of used vehicles. This is a proactive change to ensure that consumers continue to be properly protected in the future.

There is another area where added protection will be implemented. Bill 173 proposes a number of changes to the Ontario Securities Act. As outlined in the 2016 Ontario budget, the proposed changes to the Securities Act would strengthen enforcement provisions, create additional tools to provide protection for whistle-blowers, update the Securities Act to allow information obtained in investigations to be used in a broader array of proceedings under the Securities Act, and provide that certain rules relating to the publication of derivatives trades would not apply to the crown and certain crown agencies.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the financial services sector is a major, direct source of growth in our province. It is a sector that accounts for almost 10% of Ontario's GDP. It provides about 390,000 jobs, with wages averaging over 25% above the overall Ontario wage average. It is also a key enabler of growth in other sectors and the economy as a whole, supporting investment and savings, access to capital and wealth creation.

The government supports the growth of financial services by investing in skills, education and modern infrastructure, and by establishing a competitive tax system and an efficient provincial regulatory climate. The changes contained in Bill 173 would update securities laws and continue to strengthen the financial services sector, protecting consumers and investors and bolstering the stability and efficiency of financial markets.

Bill 173 also proposes changes to tax credits. Over the last year, the research and development tax credits were reviewed as part of the Program Review, Renewal and Transformation—PRRT—process to ensure they are efficient, effective and sustainable. As part of the PRRT process, the government proposes to reduce the level of support provided through the Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit and the Ontario Innovation Tax Credit.

In Bill 173, the government proposes the following changes, effective for eligible R&D expenditures incurred in the taxation years that end on or after June 1, 2016: decreasing the Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit rate from 4.5% to 3.5%; and decreasing the Ontario Innovation Tax Credit rate from 10% to 8%. The rate reductions would be pro-rated for taxation years straddling June 1, 2016. The proposed R&D tax credit rate reductions are estimated to save the province approximately $35 million in 2016-17, $65 million in the following year and $65 million in 2018-19.

But research and development remains a key priority for the government, which is why the province will reinvest savings from the proposed tax credit changes into new targeted investments across key sectors of Ontario's economy. The government is investing, for example, $35 million over five years towards establishing the advanced manufacturing consortium, $20 million over three years to partner with colleges to tackle industry challenges through innovation projects, and $50

million over five years in world-leading research at the Perimeter Institute. The province will continue to examine ways to encourage R&D investments in Ontario, increase the commercialization of research, and better support export activity, in line with its business growth initiatives.

1550

Bill 173 also contains proposed amendments to the Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996. These amendments would increase the tax rate of wines made of a blend of Ontario and imported wine content that are sold at winery retail stores. Implemented over the next four years, the increases to the basic tax for blended wine would help close the gap between the markups applied to products sold at the LCBO and taxes in the winery retail store network. This will increase government revenues to support key priorities such as health care, education and skills training, and infrastructure and transit investments, all of which benefit Ontarians.

It is important to note that the current tax rate on 100% Ontario and VQA wine will be maintained. This is consistent with Ontario's wine and grape strategy.

Bill 173 would also improve the way benefits are distributed to Ontario residents. As part of a broader transformation of services to the public, the government is proposing to improve the way certain benefit programs are delivered, making it easier for lower-income Ontarians to access benefits. The province provides a wide range of direct and in-kind benefits across a spectrum of needs, including health, dental, housing and child care. To improve access, the government is exploring initiatives that include online applications for multiple benefit programs and increased automation of back-office functions.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in 2015 the government initiated a review of the Business Property Tax Capping Program, in response to requests from municipal and business stakeholders to address the potential for inequities and economic distortions. As a result of previous enhancements, the proportion of business properties captured by the program has decreased from about 90% in 2004 to approximately 10% in 2015. Based on this review, the government announced significant enhancements to the Business Property Tax Capping Program in the 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook And Fiscal Review.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, would transform the Business Property Tax Capping Program. Beginning in 2016, municipalities would have increased flexibility to accelerate progress to current value assessment level taxes. In addition, municipalities that meet certain eligibility criteria established by the province would have the option to exit or phase out the program, if doing so would have a limited impact on business properties. As a result of these enhancements, municipalities would be able to adjust the capping program to best suit their local circumstances and improve the equity and transparency of the property tax system.

Bill 173 is also taking action on strengthening the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. The Ministry of Finance will be consulting on potential further changes to MPAC's governance structure. This will help the corporation to support its objective of remaining accountable to stakeholders, while maintaining excellence in assessment service delivery.

A collaborative approach to consulting with municipalities and stakeholders has been key to implementing improvements to the property assessment system. The ministry intends to continue this collaborative approach and is working with MPAC to engage the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto to better understand issues and opportunities for improvement related to MPAC board governance.

Pension reform is also an important issue for many Ontarians. Pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, are a new type of voluntary, tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicle. PRPPs are administered by licensed third-party administrators, such as regulated financial institutions, with investments pooled to reduce costs and improve returns. The 2016 budget announced that amendments to the act would be introduced to further facilitate harmonization with other jurisdictions and ensure the efficient operation of PRPPs.

A PRPP framework that is harmonized with other jurisdictions would help create economies of scale and minimize costs. It would also foster a greater portability, supporting a modern, mobile workforce. As the government moves forward with the implementation of PRPPs, it will continue to work with other jurisdictions in an effort to promote harmonization.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock please.

I would ask that the members listen to debate. There's just a little bit too much chatter that starts off small but begins to escalate, and I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker. So I would ask that all members agree with me. Thank you so very much.

Back to the speaker.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As I was saying, some provisions in the current Pension Benefits Act, such as those regarding locked-in accounts, do not align with the PRPP system. Therefore, in Bill 173, the amendments removing provisions regarding transfers from registered pension plans to PRPPs would increase harmonization in the operation of PRPPs with other jurisdictions, which would help limit costs.

Clarifying that the act applies not only to currently employed or self-employed members in Ontario but also to formerly employed individuals who still maintain funds in their PRPP account would facilitate the efficient operation of PRPPs.

The measures that I have described today represent only a part of the proposed budget measures being introduced through this bill. They are nonetheless reflective of our government's prudent and realistic approach to secure our province's long-term economic sustainability. So I urge all those in attendance today to vote in the future for the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow

Act (Budget Measures), 2016. This bill will make Ontario stronger and more competitive, and it will ensure our province's continued success.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 173.

I want to begin by talking from the beginning, when we had pre-budget consultations. This was before Bill 173 was brought to this Legislature. Myself, our PC member Toby Barrett, the NDP and the Liberal Party all took a pre-budget consultation tour throughout Ontario. We began in Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa. Many MPPs—in fact, some of those who are sitting here—joined us across the province at these pre-budget consultations. We held two days in Toronto here.

It was very disturbing to learn that the budget was going to be presented while we were still making pre-budget consultations. Then, of course, as time went on, we actually learned the budget was in translations while we were still meeting with people, never mind the fact that this Legislature spent $100,000 or whatever the number was to fly all of us, Hansard recorders, translators, Clerks, all of this group all over the province to have pre-budget consultations, only to learn that the translations were being done while we were still meeting with all these people who themselves travelled all over Ontario to be heard. They wanted to be heard. They wanted to talk to the government pre-budget. That means before the budget. To learn that, I think, was insulting not only to all three parties, to the nine members and all of the staff that accompanied us, but also to the people who travelled so far, especially in northern Ontario, to the communities that are so far away. I found that to be insulting, and I find that the entire pre-budget consultation was nothing more than a charade, a sham, and more evidence that, while Premier Wynne talks a big game about openness and transparency, there's nothing like that in reality. That is just absolutely known to be untrue now.

1600

Speaker, I want to talk about where we were at estimates this morning. We had the Minister of Finance at estimates this morning. We were in a room, and I looked around as I opened the discussion and said, "I remember this room very, very well." I spent almost two years of my life in that room on the gas plant scandal hearings. I bring this up because of the documentation we obtained that has a lot to do with what we are talking about here today.

I stood in that room and said to the minister, "My gosh, this room brings back a lot of memories." Certainly, when the government told us that cancellation of the gas plants was going be $40 million and the Auditor General told us $1.1 billion, we knew then what to expect from this government with respect to any numbers they'd give us, Speaker. They don't know how to give numbers correctly, either by choice or by chance. They choose not to give us the right numbers. We've seen that; that's evident now.

What we also got at those gas plant scandal hearings was a series of documents that had a lot to do with finance, and that was because they were compelled to turn over tens upon tens of thousands of documents, which they eventually turned over. One of the documents is a confidential Ministry of Finance document from March 2013.

Speaker, it was confidential; it was meant for cabinet only. It was never, ever expected that any human outside of cabinet would see it. This came from ministry staff, so I trust this document, because nobody was ever supposed to see it, so they were telling it like it is. The document says, "For 2014-15 and 2015-16"—they're speaking about the government—"not on track to meet the ... budget deficit targets." That's the truth. They are not on target.

What happens only days later? The Minister of Finance stands in here and presents a budget. In fact, in the 2013 budget, on page 103, he stood here and said, "The government is on track to eliminate the deficit.... " Speaker, their own document only days before, which they read, told them that they are not, and yet they stand here and tell us a completely different story. They told us that they were on track.

That opens the door. Now they've got to go back and figure out, "What the heck are we going to do? We just told the public something about which we know the complete opposite is accurate." So they hatched a plan. The nicest way I can say it is that they hatched a plan. The plan was to sell assets and use that money to lower the deficit. That's the plan they hatched.

Let me take a short while and talk to you about how that went together and the moves the government made so that people would never really figure out this plan that they hatched. It was so diverse. There were so many different pieces of the puzzle that would normally be unrelated, but if you put these pieces together, you see the picture very, very clearly. They hatched a plan, and it took a year to implement this plan.

It starts when the Premier stood under a big banner that said, "Beer in grocery stores." I was there. I snapped a photo of it. It's this massive 40-foot-or-so banner. I don't know how high; it must be at least 15 feet or 20 feet high: "Beer in grocery stores." There are other ministers huddled around her—by the way, this beer in grocery stores was going to be the most dramatic thing we have done to alcohol since Prohibition. Actually, it turned out that they're going to sell a six-pack in a corner store. That was the most radical thing they could come up with. "Oh, and by the way, while we're at it, we're going to sell Hydro One."

They kind of slipped in the Hydro One sale back then. It was never in Ed Clark's original report. Ed Clark said, "We're not going to sell Hydro; we're going to enhance it and get better value out of it. We're going to work hard and make improvements." And they said, "No, no, no. Get back to the drawing board, Ed, and rewrite the plan."

He came back five months later and said, "Yes, we're going to sell Hydro."

Speaker, you have to look back before that happened. The government announced a $130-billion infrastructure program. They announced it in the 2014 budget. In that budget, they said, "We're going to need some asset sales," but they talked very explicitly about what they were. They said that they were going to get $3.1 billion over four years, and $1.1 billion alone came from the GM shares that they sold and got back. So that's the bulk of it, the GM shares. Over the next three years, they were going to sell the LCBO headquarters, the OPG headquarters across the street and a couple of other real estate assets they were talking about, which altogether brought in $2 billion over three years. We understood that. We don't necessarily agree with it, but we understood it: In 2014, they were going to need $3.1 billion, including the GM shares, to help pay for that infrastructure.

But here we are, a year later now, in 2015: They made a grandiose announcement about the sale of Hydro, and they've said that that money is going to transit and infrastructure and is not for nothing else—but we'll get to that in a minute, Speaker. All of a sudden now, infrastructure is re-announced in the 2015 budget. It's absolutely identical. It's $130 billion, just the same as 2014, but now they need a $9-billion fire sale of Hydro One to make that work. Speaker, that doesn't make any sense. If they had already budgeted the $130 billion with only a small amount of assets, why do they now need the Hydro One sale tied into that? It never made any sense then; it doesn't make any sense now.

It was clear, at that point, that it appeared that they were going to take the money from Hydro One and use it to balance their budget, to artificially balance their budget. In fact, very astutely, right away—right after that happened—the Ottawa Citizen had an article, and I'll read you just the one paragraph of two sentences here:

"A reasonable person might wonder why we need to sell most of a significant public asset ... just to keep doing what we have been doing for years. The real answer, I suspect, is that putting some billions of new money into the province's transit trust will enable the government to quietly shift existing money to help it reduce the deficit or pay for other spending."

Bingo. He hit the nail on the head. This is now more than a year ago that the Ottawa Citizen figured that out.

Now we need to compile the evidence that that is indeed what was happening. What has happened from there is that the government said, "No, no, no. Hang on a second. That's not what we're doing. We're putting the money in a Trillium Trust. That's where the money is going." Well, if you look at the Trillium Trust, Speaker, it says they "may" put a "portion" of the money in the Trillium Trust. We brought amendments last year, if you remember correctly, that said, "No, no, no. Change the word 'may' to 'must' and the word 'portion' to 'all.' You must put all the money." The government voted it down. They would have no part of that, no part of it at all. That's why, to this very day, it still says they may put a portion in the Trillium Trust.

So we brought another amendment that said, "After the sale of every significant asset, the Auditor General will report to this Legislature within 90 days what was sold, how much it was sold for and where the money went." That's pretty basic. That's pretty open and transparent; no trickery there. This is just pretty easy stuff that we asked for in the amendment. It got voted down. That is what's happening. I call it covering their tracks. They wanted to make sure that there's no way to really, truly find out what was happening.

Then what they need to do now is shield everybody from ever having any knowledge of what's going on. So they go in and they shut out the legislative officers. The Auditor General now can't look into Hydro One. The Financial Accountability Officer can't look into Hydro One. Freedom of information, the Ombudsman, the sunshine list—all eight officers of the Legislature wrote a scathing letter to the Premier saying, "How dare you cut us out from the information." So that was part of their plan, I call it, to cover their tracks and to make sure that we don't ever know what was really going on.

1610

In fact, the Auditor General ended her budget committee hearings by saying that their value-for-money audit of the smart metering initiative and two of their value-for-money audits under way—electricity power system planning and electricity transmission and distribution—"are examples of work that we would not be permitted to do once the proposed amendments take effect." The government said, "Too bad. You are not getting to look at the books ever again." They cut everybody out. The Financial Accountability Officer had a lot to say because he was allowed to have six months' leeway. Boy, did he ever take great advantage of his time.

The next stage that came out was the prospectus. It told a little bit more of the details. That is when we learned that in the prospectus—first of all, as soon as the prospectus was filed, Moody's downgraded Hydro One debt from A1 to A2. That was an immediate response by the bond rating agencies over this particular deal.

One of the things that was in the prospectus was also the fact that they were going to shell out several million dollars to the Hydro One staff as well as the OPG staff. It was $87 million. They were going to receive shares to the value of $87 million: $75 million to the Power Workers' Union and $12 million to the Society of Energy Professionals. That was part of the deal.

The Financial Accountability Officer then couldn't take any more. The brand new Financial Accountability Officer, on his own initiative, decided to write a report on the sale of Hydro One. It was called An Assessment of the Financial Impact of the Partial Sale of Hydro One. This was his first-ever report. He said, "The initial 15% sale of Hydro One would significantly reduce the province's deficit in 2015-16." He figured it out. It didn't take him very long; it took him probably about two minutes to figure out that these guys were going to be using the Hydro One money to lower the deficit. That was the opening sentence in his summary in the report.

He went on to say, "In years following the sale of 60% of Hydro One, the province's budget balance would be worse than it would have been without the sale." He concludes the report by saying, "The province's net debt would initially be reduced, but will eventually be higher than it would have been without the sale." So he has told the Legislature, "Hey, we're on to you. We figured you out. You're selling Hydro One and you're using that money to lower the deficit." But they won't come clean with it. They still, to this day, continue to say, "No, no. Hang on a second. That money is being used for transit and infrastructure." They're sticking to their story. Well, the story is fine until the plan gets exposed, and the plan gets exposed when the fall economic statement comes out.

First of all, it starts to break apart with public accounts. The budget looks forward and tells you stories that they hope happen. It's aspirational. Public accounts looks backwards and tells you what really happened. So we started to see the story fall apart in public accounts. But it really crumbled when they had to come clean in the fall economic statement.

In the fall economic statement, there's a chart. Page 106, page 107, page 99, page 98: All of these pages allude to the fact that the money has gone right into general revenue. They took over $1 billion and put it directly into general revenue. They did not put it into transit; they did not put it into infrastructure. They put it into general revenue, plain and simple. It's in the budget. It's in the fall economic statement. It's printed there, flat out.

"How could they do that?" you would wonder. "Hey, I thought they were supposed to put it in transit." They continue to say that.

How they got around that—and that's what I mean; it was a workaround. Again, all of these little pieces that are unconnected and disconnected, eventually, when they're all out there and we expose each one of them one by one, it makes sense.

So one day, out of the clear blue sky, they showed up with this Bill 144, a finance bill. It's like a mini budget. It showed up one day and, 14 days later, they had stopped all debates, had quick committee hearings, had quick clause-by-clause, had a quick vote—boom. Only 14 days: That's about 10 working days, and it was all over. This was a mini budget. It was an omnibus bill, as many of us called it. It went from tobacco to horse racing and everything. But all of that was all gibberish, meant to cover up one sentence. One sentence in that bill unlocked the value of Hydro and allowed them to use it.

Let me tell you, it's a 167-page book. On page 162, there's one sentence in schedule 22, the Trillium Trust Act, about authorized expenditures—what they can spend the Trillium Trust on. It says:

"The Trillium Trust may be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund for the following purposes:

"1. To fund, directly or indirectly, costs relating to the construction or acquisition of infrastructure."

Okay. They said that they're going to use it to pay for infrastructure. All right, so here it is: It says that they have to take that money out and use it for infrastructure. But Speaker, paragraph 2: One little line says that they can "reimburse the crown for expenditures incurred by the crown, directly or indirectly, for a purpose described in paragraph 1."

They can reimburse themselves for money they've already spent or budgeted for. It has been laid bare by their own hand. They printed it because they had to give themselves the out to be able to get that money, put in the trust and use it to pay for things they've already announced. This money from Hydro One will now definitively be used to pay for the $130 billion in infrastructure that they already announced.

It's now laid bare. The Financial Accountability Officer has acknowledged that. All of the experts—the Bank of Montreal, all of the capital market groups—are saying loudly and clearly that this is a payment for monies already spent.

Speaker, there's nothing more for me to add, other than exposing that.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to lend my voice to this budget process. What I'm going to be focused on a little bit is process. I started off this debate on the 2016 budget by declaring that this process was flawed, and it was flawed on purpose. Therefore, we have a flawed budget.

This morning at estimates, it was really quite a very emotional exchange, because I think the finance minister had expected a lot of praise for this budget. With every layer that we pull back on it, we find flaws contained within it. That's why I go back to the process part.

In the past few weeks, we have had opportunities to discuss this budget, which the government honestly has the hubris to call Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. As I said, we have given some good reasons and corresponding evidence to address why this budget misses the mark on job creation and on social infrastructure.

What is quite amazing to me is that this government has the gall to brag and to boast about the low program spending in the province of Ontario to some audiences and then they move to other audiences and change their tune.

But before I continue, I think it's important to remind this House today about the tradition of how a budget is crafted, because budgets are supposed to be moral documents. They're supposed to speak to the values of the people of the province. They're supposed to be developed with the people of the province in mind. The tradition of this place is that the finance committee travels around the province and listens. It puts the call out to people across this province to listen to them—actively listen to them—and make a promise to them that they are going to take what they hear, take what they learn, and inform the budget bill.

1620

That did not happen, Mr. Speaker, for the 2016 budget. The first deputations happened in mid-January,

and the last one on February 2. The committee normally writes a report based on these findings in order to reflect what the people of this province want most to see in the government's budget—like child care funding, which is not here; like housing funding and developmental services, which are not here—and that information that we hear informs the budget.

This government was happy—happy, and quite defensive of the process—to completely circumvent the process that they claim to value. It was such a serious departure from the parliamentary tradition of this place. So I share the concern of the PC critic in this regard that this promise of accountability and transparency and open government from this activist centre is a complete farce. It reminds me of that fairy tale, The Emperor's New Clothes, because now there's no charade. What we see before us is a government that is happy—that is even content—to circumvent the democratic process on which this Legislature has depended for so many years.

The budget itself was tabled on February 25, which already at the time showed a blatant disregard for the process of pre-budget consultations. Our committee hadn't even tabled the report on these consultations. It's this report that supposedly informs the budget. Just so that people understand, we just got this pre-budget consultation report, like, 10 days ago. It is dated April 2016. It is April 2016 today, and we are debating for a time-allocated debate on budget 2016. The ruse is up, Mr. Speaker.

Since then, we've learned more about how the budget process unfolded, just to add insult to injury. This government had the budget—a completed budget document—sent for translation on January 27. You can't deny that the budget process was flawed. I hope that this government learns from this. But it's important to acknowledge that they didn't just ignore the standard process of the committee; they also felt like they could have a budget written before even hearing from everyone. This is the new selective inclusion in the province of Ontario, and it's no wonder that this Liberal budget is so misguided.

I wanted to share a little bit around the committee process because the finance committee has to go through this budget clause-by-clause, as you know, and we have to go through the entire document. It's important for people to hear how that process went for the opposition parties.

In the 2007 election, the Liberals promised that the government would review all Ontario laws for accessibility barriers. That includes 750 statutes and a number of regulations. Nine years later—nine years later, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that Mr. Clark is really interested in this—the government has only reviewed 51 of those 750 statutes. New Democrats have heard from Ontarians with disabilities, and they have said that they were not meaningfully consulted in the drafting of this budget bill, which comes as no shock given that the budget was written before the pre-budget consultations even happened. This is an example of voices being missed.

Whether or not it happens in consultations, it is still important that this government recognizes the lived experiences of Ontarians with disabilities. This should inform what barriers exist and how they can be eliminated. With that in mind, New Democrats proposed 13 amendments to this budget bill, including making the AODA act more accessible. This government decided not to embrace those amendments. In fact, they voted against all 13 of the amendments to make the budget bill more accessible.

One example of that is that—and it was so small. That's what surprised us so much, genuinely so. Sometimes you get in these situations, and there are good people on that side of the House and there are good people on this side of the House, and sometimes you think you can make some progress. We thought we had an opportunity to fight for the rights of those who have disabilities in the province of Ontario. But listen to this: All of the amendments had to do with a minimum—it would require that documents be in a format that can be read by a screen text reader or changed so that it can be read by a screen text reader. This means that anything that comes from this place—any legislation, any directives—be in a format where someone who is visually impaired could actually read it on their computer. It's a small, small thing. Each time, the government side voted this down. I was told time and time again by the members of this government on the committee that this was a good initiative and they agree with the policy, which made me feel so much better. It's a simple change that can make a world of difference to people living with visual impairments. Members of this government said they agree fully with the intent of this policy amendment, but time and time again they voted it down.

Once again, in the standard process of seeing this budget through, it has become obvious that the government doesn't understand what priorities make sense. Certainly, making a budget bill and making legislation and making this place more accessible is in the best interests of Ontarians. Surely we can agree on that.

One of the major things that we did here, across this province, throughout budget consultations had to do with child care. There were so many ways where we could see this government has ignored the needs of Ontarians in this budget. To begin with, the budget promises no new money for affordable child care. It's incredible. In fact, the regulations that are currently on the books actually demand more of the child care sector, that they do more with less, which includes having a 12-month-old baby in with toddlers. They see these little units as being very similar, when they are very different.

This is what we know—because do you know what? It's 2016. Investing in child care is a complete no-brainer. It helps the thousands of Ontario families whose children are on waiting lists to access quality care. There are 16,802 families in Toronto alone on a wait-list, and

this government decided not to invest any new money in this budget. If you want to make a difference in the lives of women, if you want to make a difference from an economic perspective, this is where the evidence says you invest, Mr. Speaker. But beyond that, by investing in child care, this government could be putting money to good use in closing the gender wage gap. I think it's next Tuesday when we hit that point where women have been working for nothing until that point and we actually start making—there's gender pay parity next Tuesday. If you want to make a difference to women in the province of Ontario, you invest in child care.

We've heard lots of rhetoric from this Premier on child care over the years. The reality today is that it's women more often than men who take on the main responsibilities of child care, both at a professional level and in the home. Money spent on early childhood education is just a smart investment. One study in Ontario found that every public dollar spent here on child care generates an economic output of more than $2.27. That's a better return on investment than selling off Hydro One, Mr. Speaker. There's so much I can say on that.

We simply cannot afford to keep ignoring child care in Ontario, but we see it happening with this budget. Even the Toronto Star said that Ontario's budget leaves Ontario's poorest children behind. This is an editorial from February 29. They point out that there's no money for affordable child care. They point out that there was no money for Ontario's 47 children's aid societies. We're still waiting for that database. You remember the one, Mr. Speaker, that's actually going to help us track vulnerable children across the province, the one that this government has kept pushing back year after year after year. This contract that this government keeps giving these companies to not perform the work that they were asked to do—come in over budget, not on time; more importantly, leave vulnerable children in the lurch. It really does shock us year after year that the funding issue around that contract continues to be pushed back.

There was a miserable 1.5% increase in social assistance rates. There's this promise out there that this government is going stop clawing back the $40—the child support payments that come into those families. It's really incredible, when you think about it, that this government can't collect on the road maintenance fees and fines that they themselves have doled out through the Ministry of Transportation, to the tune of $49 million—they can't collect those fines, but they can dip their hand into the purse of a young mother on social assistance and claw back $40 because the spouse finally anted up for some money for that family. I mean, the juxtaposition is incredible around the priorities of this government. When you compare the rhetoric and the reality, the great divide, it's like the twilight zone.

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There was no funding to alleviate the massive backlog in the province's courts. Tomorrow, we're going to have the—who's coming here tomorrow?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: OPSEU jail guards.

Ms. Catherine Fife: OPSEU jail guards are coming here tomorrow morning.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And corrections officers.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And corrections officers. When you tour a jail in the province of Ontario and you see for yourself the reality that those places are, it really is incredible. When you look at the racialized community contained within those correctional facilities, you can also draw a direct correlation between the fact that those young men and those young women don't have the money for bail, and 60% are on remand. They have not had their day in court. So they may have gone into those correctional facilities and they may be innocent, because they haven't had their day in court. But you know what? They're not going to come out of those facilities innocent, Mr. Speaker; I guarantee you that. In Thunder Bay, we heard from the mayor there. He called that correctional facility a rathole, and he said he was being kind in that description.

At the time, the finance minister had assured Ontarians with this budget that they were not going to leave anybody behind. But this editorial goes on to say, "Kathleen Wynne promised when she became Ontario's 25th Premier in 2013 to make social justice her top priority. Treasury Board President Deb Matthews, who presented the government's latest poverty reduction strategy ... said: 'We are recommitting to reducing poverty among children and youth through targeted investments and supports.' There was scant evidence to back up any of that in last week's budget." That's a direct quote from the editorial in the Toronto Star.

The reason that you did not see the priorities around poverty reduction or in a comprehensive child care strategy or in a comprehensive senior health strategy or long-term-care health strategy, the reason you did not see a made-in-Ontario plan to create affordable housing—because we will never address poverty reduction until we have a strong housing process and strategy in the province of Ontario; that just will not happen. The reason you didn't see that in this budget is because the budget was already written. I mean, it really is incredible.

Today, I have to apologize to the parents with children with autism—because after the first reading of this budget, I read, like many people did, that there was $333 million in this budget for autism. The critic from the PC Party and I went on Steve Paikin's show, The Agenda, and he asked, "What is good about this budget?" We both said, "The autism money. It's so needed." I have to apologize to the parents in Ontario for saying that because, at the time, I didn't know that this budget was going to clear out their wait-list by preventing those children who are five and older from accessing IBI treatment, which some have waited for, as we heard this morning, for four years. They were one of the fortunate ones and got an early diagnosis.

To see the painful emotion of the parents in this place this morning, knowing that this government has the opportunity to grandfather those children—there are about 2,000 children who are being completely disadvan-

taged by this policy shift. It's called a redesign. We should know better, shouldn't we? Any redesigning a policy, modernizing it, upgrading it—we should know better now in this House. So it is with great caution that I say to the parents across this province who are lobbying so hard for fairness and equity on the autism file that we are going to have to continue to push this government to at least honour their promise to those families that they have made now, to some of them, for five or six years. It really was heartbreaking this morning.

There is so much work to do on that file. You have your experts, but we have our experts. This morning, a medical doctor said that we are guaranteeing these children will end up in institutions as they grow older.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: A lost generation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A lost generation, Mr. Speaker. A lost generation.

It has to hit home. These families, these parents are in all of our ridings. You can grandfather those children. You can honour that commitment to those 2,000, because offering them $8,000 as compensation when a year of IBI actually costs $50,000 is unconscionable. It is unethical to do that to those families.

Around job creation, very quickly: I'm very shocked to see this government talk about the importance of innovation and R&D. I come from Kitchener–Waterloo. Huge, amazing things are happening there. They were so surprised to see this government cut the R&D spending, the non-refundable tax credit, from 4.5% to 3.5%. The Ontario Innovation Tax Credit, previously a 10% refundable tax credit for small to medium-size businesses, was dropped from 10% to 8%.

When OBIO was here last week, we heard about the negative impacts of this cut. Perhaps the government didn't know. That has happened before. But this will negatively impact their access to matching funds at the federal level. This is not good for Kitchener–Waterloo, Mr. Speaker. It really isn't, and we heard that first-hand last week.

There are some serious issues. The minister this morning was talking about the diversified economy. From what we see and what we just saw in the job numbers that were released last Friday, the diversified economy of Ontario is precarious, part-time, contract work. There's some new language, too, like the "flexible movement" of these jobs—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Contemporary mobile employment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, contemporary mobile jobs, which means you can have three hours here and five hours there, and good luck with that. Good luck raising a family on that; good luck making sure that your children have a better life than you did—

Ms. Cindy Forster: New Liberal buzzwords.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I know. The definitions around here are quite astounding.

Finally, just on Hydro One: I'm going to be addressing the lack of infrastructure funding, because we've gone through the numbers from 2013, 2014, 2015 and now 2016. The premise that this government has to sell Hydro One to build infrastructure is truly the emperor's new clothes story. To date, the $4.4 billion that this government has promised to spend on infrastructure—they have not honoured that. They do not have to sell Hydro One; they just have to figure out how to build infrastructure in the province of Ontario and figure out how to honour their promises of building Ontario up—not on the backs of the people of this province as you sell off the public assets, which you have no mandate to do, which you have no right to do and which is not in the best interests of the people of this province.

New Democrats cannot support this budget. It is not in the best interests of Ontarians.

I thank you for your time and for your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to bring the perspective of the people I represent in Leeds–Grenville to the budget debate, Bill 173.

First of all, I have a question for the House today: What happens when a government tunes out the voices of those who can't afford to attend the minister's $6,000-a-plate fundraiser and forges ahead with their own agenda? The answer, quite simply, is that you get a budget like the one that's before us today; a budget that is so disconnected from the day-to-day realities of Ontario families and of seniors on fixed incomes, and that everyone else is facing. In short, it's a budget that makes it harder for all Ontarians.

If you want to know how disconnected Premier Wynne and her government are, consider what they tried to do with seniors' drugs costs. To them, seniors bringing in $19,300 a year are so well off that they can dig a lot deeper to buy the medicine that they need to keep them healthy. That's how disconnected this government is.

These Liberal members have to be getting the same emails that members on this side of the House are getting from seniors who were extremely concerned with that policy. They have to know that the soaring cost of electricity is already forcing them to be choosing between heating and eating. So they're either ignoring the pleas, or they're just tuning them out completely. How else can you explain the plan in the budget to hike drug costs for 92% of seniors? Well, Speaker, they got caught, and they've shelved that increase until August 1, thanks to the thousands of seniors who took up the opposition call to flood the government with emails, letters, phone calls and petitions.

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The Premier says she will consult before making changes to income thresholds for the drug program's deductible. We've heard that before. We've heard that before from this government, so pardon me if I remain skeptical. I'm going to keep a close eye, and I know members on this side of the House are going to keep a close eye, on this government during that review.

But it's not only seniors that have expressed anger about the priorities of this budget. I've heard from

families in Leeds–Grenville who are literally devastated with the changes to autism treatment. When I heard the announcement first, I had to double-check to make sure. I couldn't believe that they were doing what they were doing. It just was unbelievable to me.

It goes back to what I said during second reading about having to look beyond the headlines with this government. You see, in the days after the budget, there was praise, even from some members on this side of the House, for the investment in autism. But when the details emerged and we learned that they've cancelled IBI therapy funding for children over five and suddenly kicked 2,000 children five years or older off the waiting list—in one fell swoop, Speaker, they were deprived of that therapy that's critical to helping them reach their full potential.

I have some of my constituents' comments that I want to put on the record today. For parents like Chelsea and Mathew Metcalfe in my riding, the decision on autism was devastating. Their eldest son was six when he began IBI, and he completed the program just before his eighth birthday. They told me that the impact IBI had on their son was remarkable. It helped him flourish in school. Now they're terrified about what's going to happen to their five-year-old son, who had waited two years to get IBI treatment and was finally in the program.

Here's what Chelsea and Mathew wrote to me last week: "With the new Ontario Autism Program, he will be kicked out of IBI before he is ready, and will never have the opportunity to access this service again.

"We cannot afford the $50,000 it costs annually for private IBI services. As I'm sure you can sympathize, an $8,000 payout is both unacceptable and insulting.

"$8,000 will only cover two months of private IBI therapy. As we learned through our eldest son's experience with IBI, it can take months for therapists to gain the instructional control required to complete programming.

"If all families can afford is two months of therapy, they will undoubtedly see no improvement in their children—which is heartbreaking." That's their quote, Speaker.

Unfortunately, it doesn't end there. I've heard from several families in Leeds–Grenville with children at Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville. I know they're coming here to Queen's Park on Thursday to tell the government exactly what they think about this rigged process—the government calls it a review—about provincial and demonstration schools. Like their actions on autism, what we've seen under the so-called cloak of secrecy, the so-called review of demonstration schools, is unbelievable. They've frozen admissions for the fall and sent teachers back to their home boards.

As Lesley Lehman, a parent in my riding and one of the passionate voices leading the fight to keep these schools open, has stated, "How can you have a school with no students and no teachers?" How can you do that, Speaker?

While the minister doesn't have the courage to admit it, she has set up this rigged process to close down these schools and shelve their life-changing programs. I wrote to the minister last month to share the stories from families in my riding. On their behalf, I want to ask that the review be put off and a fair process be started in the fall.

I want to share one comment from one of the parents hoping to enrol their student at Sagonaska: "This school will not just educate my child but will change the trajectory of his life. He will be the only one in our family to walk across a stage and receive a high school diploma someday. And when he succeeds, my whole family succeeds."

Again, you've got vulnerable students whose futures are being put in jeopardy because this government has chosen the wrong priorities.

In the time I have left—and I just have a few minutes left—I want to focus on an issue that has developed over the last couple of weeks, and that's the sudden suspension of the Ontario Trillium Foundation capital grants program. No consultation, no warning—just an email at 4:53, the day before Good Friday, two weeks before the deadline for new grant applications under the program.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport can spin it any way he wants, but that's bad news for volunteer groups, non-profits and charitable organizations. Trillium was their only source of capital funding. These funds allowed them to make critical investments to upkeep their facilities and enhance their work. As I said in my question last week, it literally keeps the roof over their heads.

What was interesting in the budget is it showed that Trillium's funding was holding firm at about $115 million. But I'll tell you something. It wasn't until we saw the ministry's estimates when we learned the truth: that the budget was actually being reduced by $25 million. The $25 million which supported the Ontario Trillium Foundation capital grants program was instead earmarked for a new program to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday.

What was the reason, Speaker? This government is so broke, it can't even fund a program that accounts for 0.02% of its total budget without putting vulnerable volunteer groups at risk. Just like seniors, kids with autism, students at provincial and demonstration schools, they are the victims of this Liberal government's waste, scandal and mismanagement.

Despite the Premier's attempts to convince us otherwise, these are the real faces of this budget, a budget that makes life harder for them, their families and their neighbours. I wanted to make sure, Speaker, that their voices were on the record today.

Those were just four programs. I could have gone on and on all afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity, and I know that my colleagues have other comments this afternoon.

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

M^me^ France Gélinas: I, too, was disappointed in the way that the budget was brought forward with complete

lack of respect for people in northern Ontario who travelled long distances to talk to their government and basically wanted to be heard, just to find out that it was all for nothing. The budget was already written.

But we were also interested to see what was going to be in the budget. We know right now that we have this huge feud between the Minister of Health and the Ontario Medical Association.

I want to put this into the record. Dr. O'Connor from my riding sent me an email, and it starts: "I would like to thank you for your support for primary care physicians as an integral part of Ontario's health care provider options.

"I have been in practice for 31 years and have been appalled by the approach of the Wynne Liberal government to the needs of patients by parcelling out primary care in the north to remote health care providers that neither live in or understand the special needs of our communities.

"This short-sighted approach impacts not only physicians but nurse practitioners who have taken extra training to provide comprehensive local care to their patients.

"Please keep up the fight to keep the provision of health care by those who live and work in the north."

This is the really sad part of this, Speaker: "After living and working in the north for all these years, I have decided to retire much earlier than I had planned. This is as a direct result of the Liberal government's negative and demeaning comments about my profession and as such, about my role. I am sure I am not alone.

"Sincerely,

"Dr. D. O'Connor, MD."

She is a very much-loved physician in my area who has decided to retire, not of her own will but because of the way she is being treated by the government. She's not the only one who feels that this budget was a complete missed opportunity to treat people fairly.

I want to quote a little bit from the Minister of Health, to help put things into perspective. On Monday, December 15, 2014, Eric Hoskins, the Minister of Health, wrote the following:

"I have been passionate about ... pharmacare and breaking down barriers to health care since entering medical school 30 years ago. Since becoming Ontario's Minister of Health, I have been determined to put pharmacare back on the national agenda."

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"It's undoubtedly one of the most important steps we can take to rededicate ourselves to the principle of universal access to health care....

"Saskatchewan blazed a path forward for public health insurance in the 1950s, and the rest of our country had no choice but to take notice. This led to the formation of a royal commission, and after years of engaging the public it came back" as medicare, "our most revered national symbol."

Funny that our Minister of Health can say this, but when the budget came out, it went in a completely opposite direction. We had this change to the way that drug costs were going to be funded to our seniors that meant that anybody who made more than $19,300 was going to see their drug costs double. How can you reconcile the fact that when they talk about what is the right thing to do, they say, "We have to rededicate ourselves to the principle of universal access," but then when they put out a budget, they go in the absolute opposite direction? We're not talking about universal access; we're talking about how anybody who makes more than $19,300 will have to help pay for those who—what is that, Speaker? What is that?

I'm happy to report that because of the good work of all of my colleague MPPs from the NDP, we were able to help the voices of seniors be heard. We read petitions. We met with CARP and seniors. In my riding, I had the pleasure to have Dot Klein, Ken Burns, Terry McMahon and Hugh Kruzel from CARP, and John Lindsay from Friendly to Seniors. They all came out and supported, through a press conference, the launch of our petition.

After tens of thousands of seniors wrote petitions, sent letters in, stood with the NDP MPPs and told the government that they had gotten it wrong, we have their promise that they are not going to implement the doubling of prescription drugs for people who make more than $19,300. So they're not doing to increase the deductible to $170, like the budget says in black and white, and they're not going to increase the copay to $7.11, like the budget says.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Do you believe them?

M^me^ France Gélinas: My esteemed colleague asks me, "Do you believe them?" It makes me really nervous, Speaker, because I have this document that the government will vote in favour of that says in black and white that this is what's going happen, and then I have a Minister of Health who, after he took the pressure of tens of thousands of seniors, says, "I'm going to hit the pause button. I'm going to remember my words, 'the principle of universal access,' and press the pause button."

But what if, in the middle of the summer, when the House is not sitting and nobody is looking—probably at about 10 to 5 on a Friday afternoon of a long weekend—he takes his hand off the pause button and this thing goes straight ahead?

How can you vote for a budget that doubles the prices of drugs for our seniors? How can you do this? You have a promise to hit a pause button, but that's just that: It's a promise to hit the pause button. How long is this pause going to be? Long enough for you to vote for the budget and then forget all about it?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Until they hit the fast-forward button.

M^me^ France Gélinas: They'll hit the fast-forward button, my colleague says. That would be terrible.

We also have brought forward to the government the fact that lives in northern Ontario have been put at risk because of the moving of the OPP helicopter. We have more and more municipalities representing people in northern Ontario who told the government that they don't want this resource to be moved to the south. They want

this resource to be available to the people of the north. We have the Manitoulin Municipal Association, the municipality of Mattice-Val Côté, the city of Greater Sudbury, Hornepayne, the township of Billings; we have the township of Fauquier-Strickland—more and more of them, but nothing in the budget.

It's the same thing right now in Foleyet, a beautiful little community in the north of my riding which is about an hour and a half from either side, from Timmins or from Chapleau. They are losing their OPP detachment. There has been an OPP officer in the northern part of my riding for as long as there has been OPP in Ontario, but under this government, this little community is going to find themselves without this resource.

Why is it that the government is not able to maintain services that have been there forever, that have served the public really well? There is a provincial park, Ivanhoe Lake Provincial Park, just beside Foleyet. Hundreds of people come in the summer when the park is open. There are a lot of outfitters, a lot of people milling around, plus the residents of the village of Foleyet, but the government has decided to take away their OPP station. They will now have to phone, and hopefully somebody from Timmins will be able to come.

But this is also the highway that is quite regularly closed. It was closed for a week at a time in 2014 because of a culvert that had collapsed. This is also the highway that is poorly maintained; we've had many, many complaints for better winter maintenance of this highway. So how exactly is an OPP officer from Timmins or from Chapleau going to come? If you've had to wait for an hour and a half, how much of an emergency response is this going to be? And that's assuming that they are right in Timmins at the time, not gone to South Porcupine or even farther away.

This is the kind of support that we wanted to see in the budget, but we got the exact opposite. We got cut back on services to serve the north. We got an increase in the copay for seniors. We've got this huge, complete disregard for the important work that physicians do in Ontario.

The budget was the opportunity for the government to really send a message that things were going to change. Nothing has changed, Speaker. It is getting worse, not better. People are having trouble making ends meet, and this is not going to help one northerner make it easier to make ends meet.

I will save some time on the clock for my fellow NDPers, but there is no way that I could support a budget like this.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to clean up things around here and join the debate—to do a little housecleaning, but also maybe to clean it up for the PC Party here on the budget bill debate today.

I might point out that we're working on a constricted timeline here. We have about 10 minutes left because the government, as is their wont, time-allocated this bill. They wanted to make sure that there was limited debate on third reading, after the committee hearings which the budget normally goes through.

But really, it doesn't much matter whether there are committee hearings or pre-budget hearings, because when it comes to a Liberal budget, the whole thing is a sham anyway. We know what happened in the pre-budget hearings. Traditionally, in this Legislature, the committee goes out and travels across the province of Ontario and receives input from concerned citizens and stakeholders who believe they have something positive to contribute in a way that will help the government draft a budget that speaks to what Ontario's realities and needs are. But in the case of the 2016-17 budget, we all know that the ink was dry and it was already sent for translation into the French language before the committee hearings were even completed.

Ms. Catherine Fife: On January 27.

Mr. John Yakabuski: January 27—I hear that from the critic from the third party, Ms. Fife, and she would know. She's the finance critic. She was at every one of those meetings, I'm sure.

How disappointing it must have been to know that you're going through a process of hearings, knowing that everything you're hearing from those people at those different committee hearings, everything that you're hearing from them—not to overuse the word "hearing"—is unfortunately, sadly a waste of time, because it was not being considered in the drafting of the budget whatsoever.

1700

I'm not going to have enough time to tell the whole story because I've been time-allocated, but I am absolutely convinced that the longer I am here—I'll give them credit. They're crafty. They're sly. In fact, I would suggest that they're diabolical. Can I use that word here? I think I can. They're diabolical in the fact that no one is better at following their mantra, not of "What are we going to do? What can we accomplish that is in the best interest of the people of Ontario?" That never really crosses their mind. What crosses their mind is, "How can we massage this in a way that is in the best electoral interest of the Liberal Party?"

Let's talk about the things that are in the budget now. Let's talk about the things that the budget is dealing with now. The number one thing—and it started with last year's budget—of course is the decision on the share sale of Hydro One, which started later. We're going into the second tranche of sales of Hydro One. The announcement was made last week. The only reason that announcement was made to move into the second 15% sale was to divert attention away from the crisis that the Premier was finding from finding out—not her finding out, but the public finally finding out how the ministers in her government had quotas for fundraising. They were having these special, private dinners at very, very high prices, where ministers would be holding an event that was directly related to the stakeholders of which they had some carriage over. It was very questionable.

But anyway, let's get back—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

It's nice to see people engaging in debate. However, when it gets to the point where I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker and where comments perhaps are not aimed at what the speaker is talking about, I would ask the members to refrain. As a result of that, I would encourage greater co-operation from the government side, since it is, obviously, the opposition who are, in fact, debating at this point in time.

Back to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate that, Speaker.

When I'm debating in this House, I would like to keep it down to a nice, comfortable level of volume. But it seems that whenever I strike a nerve with the folks on the other side—and it always happens when you hit a sore point, because they know that you've caught on to something. So then they try to shout me down, and you know that I hate to have to raise my voice above the crowd. But if I have to, that's my only choice, with the exception, Speaker, if you intervene to help protect me.

On this Hydro One sale: We all know the motive behind it. Our critic pointed that out very clearly today. But the whole point of the Hydro One share sale is to give the false impression, as we move to 2017-18, that they're actually able to manage the fiscal affairs of the province in such a way that they are able to table a balanced budget. If they have all of this revenue from the sale of Hydro One and they push that towards eliminating the deficit—I'm not capable of doing the analysis because we only have so much information, but let's just say, for the sake of argument, that they're able to accomplish that for the 2017-18 budget. Every real financial analyst out there knows that that doesn't address the structural deficit that will continue to exist in this province. Because you've had one-time cash or cash from a specific source—it's like winning a ticket draw for $25,000. Your household budget is going to look great. But if that $25,000, that one-time money, wasn't there, and you were already struggling, you'd be struggling.

That's the same issue with the government. They're struggling with the structural deficit in this province that they have created. They're struggling with this structural deficit, so they're hoping that by clouding the waters on the Hydro One sale, people in 2017-18 will actually give them the benefit of the doubt and say, "Oh my goodness. Look at that. They've been able to balance the budget," and then accept the false pretense that these people are actually good fiscal managers. Because they are not. They're the worst fiscal managers in the history of the province of Ontario—worse even than the David Peterson Liberals of 1985 to 1990.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would love to keep it lower, Minister, if you would allow me to do that.

So they're worse fiscal managers even than the David Peterson Liberals from 1985 to 1990, and that is saying something. That's my point about how everything they do is predicated on, "How do we present the most appealing picture to the voters in 2017-18?" and not about what is good for the people of the province of Ontario and what is good for the province in general as it faces a very difficult and challenging world economy.

Let's speak to a couple of things in the budget. They've got so much confidence. The Minister of Finance, Charles Sousa, presented me with this budget because I was making a little bit of fun in my earlier address at one time, and I said I found the budget not even in the fiction section of the library but in the fantasy section of the library, because that's exactly what it was. When you drill down in this budget, it is just a fantasy. The minister sent me one over, signed to me personally.

But if he was so proud of that budget, why is it that they recognize that, even in a couple of weeks, they've had to back down on their drug charges in the budget? Now, they haven't done anything by regulation and they haven't done anything by amendment to the budget, but now they're saying that the $170 that was going to be an additional charge for people who make over $19,300 or, if you're a couple, $32,300—if you're making $32,300 as a couple in the province of Ontario, is there anybody out there suggesting that you're wealthy? I think not. But the government was going to be ensuring that those people would be paying $170 each more for prescription drugs under their new plan.

What happened was that seniors read between the lines. They figured this out, and the opposition parties—ourselves and the third party—were getting deluged with calls from seniors saying, "What's going on here? This is crazy. This is unfair." And we brought that issue to the Legislature. Oh, but this document which they were ready to swear on that it was the best thing since the wheel was invented—they backed off under the pressure. They backed off. So they don't even believe in their own document. Why? Not because they believe that they needed to change it because they believed that was right. No, they're changing it because they know the politics surrounding it were wrong. They made a bad political decision and they're changing it because of that.

It speaks to my point: Nothing they do in this Legislature, whether it's in the budget or any other piece of legislation, is predicated on anything but what they must do to get votes in the next election—or the next by-election, which will be coming within the next few months, because by statute they're going to have to. Everything they do is going to be directed to that goal—winning the people's hearts and minds for an election—and not what is right for the province of Ontario.

That's not how you run a government. You've got to take your responsibilities seriously and not worry so much about the next election. Worry about what is right for the people of Ontario today, tomorrow and into the future.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to attempt to change the tone a little bit. I appreciate the speech that was given—it was quite good—but I'm going

to come at this from a bit of a different perspective. I've just come off a teleconference with the Attawapiskat First Nation and federal and provincial representatives of various ministries and agencies that are responding to the crisis in that community. I'm raising it in context of this budget because the budget allows us greater latitude, Speaker, as you well know, to be able to raise issues that have to do with money, and this is obviously a money issue.

1710

What was interesting is that the conversation that we were having with the community was actually pretty direct. Chief Bruce Shisheesh asked us to do a couple of things. One of the things that he asked was that there is an issue in his riding that needs to be dealt with, but this is not the first time that it has been raised. We've seen these types of attempts in the past where, unfortunately, people have attempted suicide. There have been responses, but those responses, in some cases, fell on deaf ears. Other times, there was a response, but once the cameras moved away and it had folded off the front page and fell to the floor, the community was left again to deal with it as best they can.

One of the things that the chief is asking for in council, and to those people that were present from the community at this meeting, is that whatever we do now, we need to make sure that the Ministry of Finance provides the funding necessary so that we have the services in our communities—not just Attawapiskat; unfortunately, there are many other communities across the north that have the same issues, in the Far North specifically, when it comes to First Nations—so that we have the services in the community to be able to deal with counselling; to be able to deal with how we're able to give young people something to do as far as proper facilities to spend time in so that they don't lead themselves astray; to doing whatever needs to be done in order to allow kids to have healthy lives—and people of my age, because it's people of different generations who, unfortunately, go down this route—so that they're able to live a meaningful life and feel as if, "You know what? It's worth carrying on."

So what the chief really asked for—I'm very thankful that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Children and Youth Services, both ministers of this crown, are going to Attawapiskat tomorrow. What they're going to hear is the chief say, "I'm very pleased that you're here. I'm very pleased. We want to work with you. We want to find solutions to this problem that are not only short-term but long-term. But, please, let's make sure that what needs to be done carries on beyond the news cycle of today and tomorrow." That's the first thing that the chief has said.

The second thing the chief said—and community members, Deputy Grand Chief Friday and others—is that whatever we do, we need to understand that these are First Nations communities. The response in a First Nations community such as Attawapiskat has to be tailored to the reality of those communities. These are Cree people; they're Mushkegowuk. They're not Gilles Bisson, Franco-Ontarian from Timmins, or Cindy—I don't know what's your—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Scotch-Irish.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Scotch-Irish from Welland.

We have a different cultural context about how we deal with things, and we live in communities that are far different as a result of our geography and as a result of our culture.

One of the things the community really is asking for is that when the ministry and this government respond to whatever it is that needs to be done, that we remember that we need to do it within the context of how the Mushkegowuk people do things. It may be different than the way we would do it, but that's fine because whatever it is that we do, it has got to be done in some kind of way that in fact reflects who they are and that they can connect to.

The second thing they're saying is they're pleased that the federal and provincial governments are responding to this crisis. They acknowledge there's much being done in the short term to deal with this crisis, and they're thankful for that and say so publicly at these meetings. But, they want to make sure that our response over the longer term looks at how we develop services that reflect the community's needs, but also are sensitive to the community's culture and language.

The other thing that the chief asked for—I thought this was rather interesting; I think this is something that people may not think of. You know, Mushkegowuk people are a proud people. They're like you, Mr. Speaker, in your community. You want your community to be seen in a positive light. You want the community to be seen as a place to live and a place to feel good about. He's a little bit worried about what some people are doing on Facebook and what some people are doing even in the media: pouncing on the negative without talking a little bit about the positives and talking about what can be. So he's asking all of us—and I include myself in that—to be mindful when we communicate around this issue, either by way of social media or by way of media, that we're sensitive. There's a lot of good people in that community, and they don't want to be seen in a bad light.

They acknowledge there's a problem. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, a lot of it stems back to the residential school experience. People who have been hurt and bruised and damaged as a result of those experiences—it has put them in a situation where they're having difficulty in their lives today. They're having children and those children are having to live within the families where people are hurt, and it's affecting their ability to cope. But he asks, can we please make sure that whatever we do when we communicate and do these things, we do so mindful of the community.

The other thing was—and this is something I spoke to at the meeting today, and I spoke to at the summit on health services at James Bay two weeks ago—that yes, the province and the federal government can respond to this crisis by offering some interim measures right now,

but we really need to develop health policy and health services on the James Bay that is driven by First Nations themselves.

A lot of people in this House may not know this, but guess what? Health services and social services are not a federal responsibility on-reserve; they're provincial. We own and operate the hospitals. We fund the hospitals and health services in our communities of the James Bay as we do in other communities across Ontario. Child and youth services are mandated by provincial law. Policing is mandated by provincial law. NAPS is one of ours; it's one of our creations as a province. In fact, I was a member of the government that was there when we created NAPS in the first place.

But one of the things we really need to make sure we do is that as we move forward with the completion of integration of the Weeneebayko hospital now with the federal hospital of yesterday, we don't necessarily just continue with the amalgamation of the federal-provincial hospitals from the perspective of an institution, but we look at developing health services and social services on the James Bay that affect health in a more holistic way that is really driven by the First Nations, that is sensitive to their cultural and linguistic needs, sensitive to the geography of the area and is done so in a way that reflects who they are. So, rather than having a LHIN, as we have now, we actually replace the LHIN with some sort of administrative structure that plans and delivers health services for the James Bay within the context of who they are, driven by themselves.

We cannot continue a colonial approach to trying to fix what was a colonial problem, and that is the creation of reserves. We need to allow First Nations to design a system that works for them, and the Ministry of Finance here in Ontario has to play its part in funding those particular ministries that would allow that to happen.

The message that I bring back from Chief Shisheesh and others is that they appreciate the response that our province and the federal government are doing, and those who are visiting the community and trying to find solutions. They're very thankful that that is happening, but remember that this has to be a long-term engagement and one that is wrapped around who they are and who they want to be as far as the Mushkegowuk people of the James Bay.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Wednesday, March 9, 2016, I'm now required to put the question. Mr. Sousa has moved third reading of Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statues. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I heard a nay.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I have just received a vote deferral.

"To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on third reading of Bill 173 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, April 13, 2016."

Third reading vote deferred.

1720

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before we get into the next orders of the day, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. McMahon assumes ballot item number 48 and Mrs. Martins assumes ballot item number 52.

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

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

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 100, the trails act. At the outset, I want to say that this bill has created an awful lot of contention throughout rural and northern Ontario. It's one where I believe there has been a lot of misconception, misunderstanding—

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's confusing.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and as my colleague the honourable member from Simcoe–Grey says, it's confusing.

I want to bring to the House this particular issue and ask the government, as it goes into committee after second reading, to widely consult in our communities about this bill. I do so because I think there are three major stakeholders across this province that haven't had the opportunity to provide their input. They would like to understand a little bit more about the misinformation about this particular initiative. In particular, I look at municipalities in small communities. But even in my city of Ottawa, the second-largest city in all of Ontario, a city that has almost one million people, we have a multi-million-dollar snowmobile industry that assists not only our rural economy in the city of Ottawa, but also the economy as a whole.

I'd also like to point out that it's not only municipalities and snowmobilers—snowmobiling clubs being our

second stakeholder, which are largely volunteer-run by people who want to have a positive impact on recreation and the economy in their communities—but thirdly, I think there are private landowners and people who own properties that are adjacent or near these particular trails.

One of the things I wanted to do today was bring forward an individual's concern, who happens to wear many hats with respect to Bill 100. His name is Councillor George Darouze. He is a city councillor in the city of Ottawa. He represents Osgoode Ward, which is in my constituency of Nepean–Carleton. He's also the former president of the Ottawa snowmobile club, which generates a number of recreational opportunities for our community.

I would like to read into the record his letter to me, which he just sent today, because he and I have heard from our constituents that this is a very confusing bill. I read to you right now from George Darouze:

"Bill 100 is creating more and more issues among my residents. There are a great deal of misconceptions out there, landowners are confused and scared that they will be losing their land"—and that, I say to you, Speaker, is a concern they have. "I really think that more clarity is a necessity, and strong messaging needs to be used to make people understand what's being proposed here. Thus far, efforts have been insufficient.

"I have heard from a few residents who are closing their sections of the trail as a result of the bill. This is having and will continue to have a negative effect on the snowmobile industry, which concerns me deeply. The snowmobile industry brings millions of dollars into the community, organized and run largely by volunteers from the community. Snowmobiling is a core part of our rural life. I would" ask that you "take a strong stand on behalf of our constituents and the snowmobile industry to support our community.

"I believe damage has been done that needs to be repaired."

Speaker, I don't think it is unreasonable for the official opposition or residents across this province to ask this government to consider deeper and more wholesome public consultation with those who are affected by this bill, as Councillor Darouze said, to bring more clarity to this issue in particular.

I know that I am not alone in voicing my concern about Bill 100 on the floor of this assembly. In fact, my colleagues from many different parts of Ontario, hours and hours and hundreds and maybe even thousands of kilometres away from my constituency in the city of Ottawa, from across the province, are also bringing their concerns to the floor of this assembly and suggesting to this government that it might be time to listen to rural Ontario.

Speaker, if I may digress for one moment, because I think this is actually part of a larger issue that we have seen play itself out under this Liberal government over the past 13 years.

I was elected 10 years ago, on March 30—

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Steve, thank you very much.

I first took my seat on April 13, 2006, a 31-year-old young mother. I took the floor—actually my former colleague was Christine Elliott; we walked in here at the same time.

The reason I tell you that is because the first issue that hit my radar screen as a young MPP from Nepean–Carleton was the Liberal government wanting to do two things: one was shut down farmers' markets and bake sales and all of that—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke remembers that—and the second was the rumour going around rural Ontario that they were going to tax well water. Remember that?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Oh yes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You, too, remember that, my dear friend, Mr. Rinaldi, because you were here at the time.

The problem is that this is what happens to the people of rural Ontario under this Liberal government. They have created a rural-urban divide in this assembly. You only have to look at where the seats on this side of the House come from and where the seats on that side of the House come from. I think it's really important—

Ms. Catherine Fife: What about us?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, you're also on our side. I say this to the New Democrats, who also represent rural and northern ridings.

The point of this is simply put. When I look at the catastrophic policies with wind turbine developments, when I look at the issues that we have with wells and with bake sales at churches, and then I look at this trails bill, it speaks to a recurring problem that this government has in actually communicating effectively and consulting with, in a meaningful way, rural Ontario. When they don't do that—because they do not have an effective rural affairs champion on that side of the House—we end up with misinformation, misconceptions and misunderstanding, and people feel that they have been misled. My opinion on this, Speaker, is that they have an opportunity with Bill 100 to go to these communities and let them have their input.

That brings me to something else in the short period of time I have left. I think this assembly has had a great deal of loss with respect to public consultation. When I first arrived here a decade ago, Dalton McGuinty was not afraid of consulting the public. In fact, he took committees, he travelled across Ontario, and he let those committees have their public hearings in communities that were affected by relevant legislation.

That hasn't happened under this current Premier, Premier Wynne. In fact, what has happened, as we often see and what we just did with the budget bill, is that it's time-allocated, it's rammed through this House and there aren't adequate public hearings. As my colleague Vic Fedeli will tell you, even if there are public hearings, they're not listened to.

I think I can say with absolute confidence that if this Liberal government decided, with Bill 100, to travel to

eastern Ontario, to travel to northern Ontario, to travel to central Ontario and to travel to southwestern Ontario, they may actually hear from people in Leamington about how this bill will affect them; they may hear from colleagues in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, in Simcoe–Grey, in Huron–Bruce and in Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Hear, hear.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Exactly. They may want to hear from them.

Speaker, that is why I spoke today: because I'm appealing to this Liberal government to finally show rural Ontario that it cares and to finally say that they'll speak to the three major stakeholder groups that are nervous about this legislation. That is our municipalities. I say this as a resident of the city of Ottawa; I say this for the snowmobile club that has generated a lot of income for my community; and certainly for the landowners who right now, without sufficient information, have become unduly concerned. I think if the government were reasonable about this, we could come to a better conclusion, but, simply put, at this moment they aren't.

1730

If I may, just in the moment I have left, talk about the tremendous time I had in the last year of going out with the Ottawa-Carleton snowmobile club in Osgoode—it was tremendous to see this volunteer-run organization that respects the landowners in their community and respects the environment and really embraces their sport include myself and several other colleagues to come out. I might point out that it wasn't me, as the VIP politician, who had my car stuck in the snow; that was my federal member. It wasn't me who actually broke my pelvis; that was the mayor. But the reality is—

Mr. Jim Wilson: What kind of a run was that?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It turned out to be quite an interesting day, Speaker. But I can tell you one thing: The Ottawa-Carleton snowmobile club treated us with wonderful hospitality and gave us a great thrill.

I'm pleased to stand up for my city, for the snowmobile club, and for the landowners in Nepean–Carleton. I'd just ask that the government consider actually speaking to them for once instead of drafting legislation and ramming it through this House without any consultation whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

M^me^ France Gélinas: It's not very often that the reality of people in Ottawa matches perfectly the reality of people in Nickel Belt, but it does. Same as hers, I have an email here from the Walden Sno Runners, district 12. There's also the Sudbury snowmobile club.

This bill has caused some small business owners some really, really harsh penalties. Some of the landowners withdrew their agreement for the snowmobile trails to go through. Entire trails in my riding were closed after this bill came out, which means that every small business along the trails, who depend on snowmobilers so they have some kind of an income, lost. You couldn't get to them even if you wanted to.

The way snowmobile clubs do their trails, they tend to go through marinas once the lake is frozen. A marina is very helpful in the summer for the boats, but in the winter they have gas, they have food, they have a bathroom. It's the perfect spot to stop. And for the marina, it is an opportunity to make an income in the winter. So all of the snowmobile trails throughout all of northeastern Ontario, we all go through. But it only took one. One landowner says no and then you cannot use that trail anymore. You cannot get to that small business to buy gas and food and all the rest of it, and that means a huge loss of income.

Why? Because this bill was rolled out without talking to them. Why didn't you come? Why didn't you explain? Now we have this polarization of this issue where people have made up their mind. Whether it's factual or not, they have made up their mind. They have said, "No, I'm not going to go to a lawyer to figure this out. I'm just going to say no," and the people of northeastern Ontario are paying the price.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I was amused by the member from Nepean–Carleton talking about consultation in rural Ontario. This was from a member who must have voted for the government that forced amalgamations on rural communities over their objection, with no consultation. She probably voted for the government of Mike Harris that downloaded health and social services while the government in Manitoba, when I was mayor of Winnipeg, was uploading those. I remember the pain talking to my friends across the Manitoba-Ontario border as, without consultation, hundreds of millions of dollars of costs were downloaded—or, talking about roads and trails, when they downloaded all highway costs to that, costing, again, hundreds of millions of dollars to municipalities that had to absorb those, without consultation. So I don't think we have lessons to take from the member—and one day a little humility or acknowledgement of all of that forced downloading.

Now, the minister has been out, as have I as the environment minister, listening to that. This idea of the issue of easements, Mr. Speaker—it sometimes helps. I was a mayor in Manitoba. You would be scraping some of the members off the ceiling of this House if we normalized our trail policy with Quebec and Manitoba, because the rights to access waterfronts and rights-of-way that the government and municipalities can use in eminent domain would scare the bejeebies out of the landowners' and property rights groups in Ontario.

This is the softest, lightest law of any Canadian province, and the most forgiving, creating the least amount of legal risk and obligation. If this is too much, if this is scaring off folks—and most of my family lives in Sudbury and they all have ATVs and they have Ski-Doos—if this is a problem, then Ontarians somehow must be weaker-skinned than Manitobans, Albertans or Quebecers, because this is a very easy-to-digest and a very well-consulted piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Certainly, there was a lack of consultation, as was defined by my colleague very clearly. I'm not aware of any farmers that were consulted anywhere. Local snowmobile clubs tell me that most of them were very surprised by this bill. No farmer asked for an easement. No snowmobiler asked for an easement. Yet, the bill provides for easements, and nobody wanted one.

Another question that might arise is, why does this bill even exist? Why is it here? Usually, we debate bills to correct a problem or to solve a problem, but we've had snowmobile trails in Ontario for 50 years without Bill 100. Snowmobilers and landowners made mutual agreements on their own without government assistance or help. It's voluntary, no money changes hands, and it has worked very well. We have 80,000 kilometres of trails in the province of Ontario. Three quarters of those trails are on crown land and one quarter on private land. That has worked extremely well without Bill 100 and without easements. Everybody is getting along just fine. Snowmobilers are responsible and farmers are happy. So why do we need Bill 100?

It seems like we have created a piece of legislation—and since it's voluntary and you don't have to comply with it unless you want to, it would do nothing. We have no problem, so it solves no problem. What we have here is Bill 100 to solve a problem that does nothing to solve a problem that doesn't exist. I think if we vote yes for something that does nothing, the people of Ontario will judge us that way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I think I've have had an opportunity to speak to this bill in some form over the last couple of weeks.

The member from Nepean–Carleton raised a couple of issues around the activity of snowmobiling. That's not such a great issue any longer in my area of the province. It used to be. It used to be a pretty booming business in Niagara, but because we have such mild winters these days—we can have a snowstorm that goes until 3 o'clock in the morning, and by morning the snow is melted—it isn't such an issue. But people who have those snowmobiles are now using them on our recreational canal lands. They're actually using those snowmobiles and tearing up the land along the recreational canal land.

I think what this bill is going to need at the end of the day, whether it passes—or when it passes. I guess it isn't "whether it passes" in a majority government. Right? When it passes, it's going to need some enforcement, and enforcement, typically, is a problem under this government. We see it under all kinds of legislation where we pass many bills, but then we don't put in the enforcement piece or the actual people to do the enforcement.

Now, the Minister of the Environment spoke about access to waterways in other provinces. I know that the member from Niagara Falls has a private member's bill that's sitting on a ledger sheet in committee, waiting to be heard, about the right of access for citizens in this province to the Great Lakes beaches and other lakes in the province. I would hope that the government would soon be bringing forward that piece of legislation, so that people in this province actually have access to their beaches and to their lakefront.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nepean–Carleton for final comments.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: At risk of repetition, I again will call on the government to do what I think is the right thing in rural Ontario, to ease many concerns from people on both sides of this issue, and that is to consult with them. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to heed the warning signs that we're seeing right now from people on both sides of this issue.

Unfortunately, when I heard from the government, when they just had the Minister of Climate Change stand up, it was as if he's digging in more, and decided to insult the Progressive Conservative Party, decided to continue insulting rural Ontario, decided to not take responsibility for the feelings that are out there. I'm simply providing that response. I believe, by the way, my colleagues in the New Democratic Party also are concerned, in their constituencies.

If the government wanted to show that they're serious about mending this rural-urban divide that we have across this province at this particular time, then they would be a bit more serious and listen to the valid concerns that people have, whether that's a municipality—like I said, the city of Ottawa is almost a million people, the second-largest in Ontario—the snowmobiler clubs that are using these trails for recreation, or the private landowners that are out there and feel that they're affected.

Again, sometimes simply communicating to people in a respectful way, rather than the way the minister responsible for climate change communicated, would go a long way in alleviating a lot of concerns. But unfortunately, the message I take from today is that they're not listening to my constituents. They're not listening to my city councillor. They're not listening to the snowmobile clubs. They're not listening to my local landowners. That's a pity.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of my riding of Windsor West to speak to Bill 100, the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act.

I have to say, Speaker, that I was scheduled last week to speak to this for 20 minutes, and I think that my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh used up the time on the clock. He closed out the show. Frankly, I'm glad I didn't have to follow him, because he's very good at waxing poetic. He's very eloquent, and I'm not sure that he's someone I would want to follow in debate.

So I have my 20 minutes' worth of notes here. I'm going to try to trim them down to 10 minutes, so you'll

have to bear with me as I meander through the trail of papers I have here and try to get through all the important points.

In Ontario, when we speak of trails, there are many things we could be referring to: footpaths, multi-use tracks, on-road bicycle routes, walkways, boardwalks, sidewalks, utility corridors, former rail lines, forestry and mining access roads designated as trails, waterways and portage routes. The only reason, frankly, that I'm aware of portage routes is because my family and I go camping every day—or every summer. It would be nice to go camping every day, except for in the winter. I'm not fond of the snow. We go to Algonquin park, where they have many beautiful trails. I encourage anybody who hasn't been there to go there. One of our favourite places to camp is Rock Lake. We go to the unserviced sites. That's about as roughing it as I like to get. We stay in a tent. We do the trails there. We do Booth's Rock and Lookout Point and the Beaver Pond Trail. It's fascinating, if you're not a northerner and you don't experience it and don't live it every day, to see the wildlife, to see the moose, the bear, the beavers and all the wildlife that are around. If you're not careful—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Is that all you know?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: No, there's lots of wildlife there.

But if you're not careful when you're camping and you leave your extra food garbage lying out or you leave your coolers lying out—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Or your small children.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Hopefully, not your small children—unless you've slathered them in peanut butter or something. If you're not careful, you get to see the bears up close and personal.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They'll scare the bejesus out of you.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Scare the bejesus out of you.

I encourage anybody who does take in the beauty of Algonquin park to be very careful and mindful of the wildlife, and remember that you shouldn't be feeding them. They need to learn how to feed themselves. Often, human food is not suitable for wildlife.

To get back on topic, Speaker, the bill before us today enacts the Ontario Trails Act, 2015, and makes amendments to the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act, the Occupiers' Liability Act, the Off-Road Vehicles Act, the Public Lands Act and the Trespass to Property Act. It's supposed to be consolidating a lot of stuff. It's confusing to many people—just what exactly it encompasses.

The stated purpose of the bill is to provide the trails community with enhanced tools to effectively develop, operate and promote trails; remove barriers to help connect and expand trails across the province; increase trail awareness; and promote local tourism by recognizing trails of distinction. The bill also aims to address long-term procurement of trail lands and tourism promotion.

Legislation would see Ontario Trails Week correspond with its international equivalent. As my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh pointed out, there is some confusion around that because it says that there is a commitment to make this around Ontario Trails Week, but then it goes on to say that the minister can change it to whatever he or she sees fit. So there is a little confusion written directly into the bill.

And it requires the trails strategy to be reviewed and maintained.

The legislation also enables the development of a classification system to help users find trails that match their interest and ability. I think that's important, because as someone who is from the sunny deep south of Ontario, as I think I've stated, I'm not too fond of the snow. Although I did grow up in London, and there were times where, for Halloween, we didn't even put costumes on because there was already enough snow on the ground to put on a snowsuit to go trick-or-treating—it doesn't happen frequently, but it has happened—since I moved to Windsor many decades ago, I've become a little spoiled by the weather there and I try to stay away from where there's too much snow. With all due respect to my colleagues from the north, I'd like to know whether I'm heading onto a trail that would be a snowmobile trail or whether I'm heading onto a trail that's going to take me to a nice, warm lodge where I can sit by the fire and wait for the snow to disappear.

In the brief time that I have left, I'd like to talk about some of the trails in Windsor and Essex county. We have many beautiful trails. The one that comes to mind right off the top of my head—and I want to make sure it gets mentioned before my time runs out. We have a naturalized area in Windsor: Ojibway. There is a big-box development in the works as we speak that is currently in very close proximity to this naturalized area. They've already started to clear the land. It used to be the Windsor Raceway and slots. I don't think it's any secret to the people of Ontario what the government has done to the racing industry.

It was really sad to see our track closed. So many horses were put down. Many trainers, veterinarians and others from that particular industry were out of work or had to move on to find work. Now we're finding that this area that's close to Ojibway is potentially going to end up with a Walmart. That is a threat to the wildlife in the area. We have many endangered species in the Ojibway area, and they're at risk from this big-box development and crossing the street—the increased traffic. When the wildlife goes to cross the street from one area to another, they're at a real risk of being killed. Again, these are many endangered species. I did write a letter to the minister in charge, asking that he intervene, and nothing came of that. Unfortunately, they've already started to bulldoze the lands.

There are also the Maidstone Woods. One of the many benefits of living in the so-called banana belt is our pleasant summer days. A great way to spend a nice Sunday afternoon this summer would be to take a trip to Maidstone and visit the Maidstone Woods. The woods include a trail through the forest to Puce River, a great stop if you want to have a picnic lunch.

Also, I just received my invitation today to go to Malden Park for Earth Day events on April 24. This was

an invitation directly from the city of Windsor to attend. It was nice to see that in the invitation they mentioned that they are encouraging people to ride to Malden Park and then, once they are in the park, to bike the trails. They're going to be launching their Gear Up and Go program from Cycle Windsor-Essex. The city of Windsor is encouraging the people who live in Windsor and Essex county to enjoy the trails that we offer.

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We have a beautiful waterfront trail that extends a great distance through Windsor. I'd encourage everybody to come down and check that out. We have the Festival Plaza where we have some incredible events that take place in the summertime.

The beauty of Windsor and Essex county is the fact that we have very good weather. While there was a blizzard here in Toronto, it was beautiful at home. It was above zero. So people can use our trails all year round. Although you can't come and snowmobile or you can't really come and cross-country ski through our area, you can come and walk the paths and enjoy what Windsor and Essex has to offer.

In the minute and a half that I have left—that really went fast; I didn't even get through half of my notes, Speaker. I think it's important to point out that, on the government side, they've been saying that on this side of the House—and I'm going to speak specifically about our caucus—we are creating some of the confusion or creating concern over this bill, when, really, all we're doing is saying that they have not consulted properly, they haven't got the information to the people that this would affect. People need to know that if they open up their property for people to use for trails, for whatever it may be—a hiking trail, a snowmobile trail—landowners need to know what their rights and obligations are when they decide to open up their land for use.

The government hasn't done a very good job of letting people know that. That's not the responsibility of the people on this side of the House. It's their bill; it's their legislation, which they're probably going to ram through because they have a majority government. It's their obligation to make sure that people are clear on the legislation they're putting through. Rather than saying that we are creating the confusion, and we're getting people upset, what they need to do is take the opportunity to really get the information out there and truly consult with people. Let them know exactly what this bill means for them, for those that would use the trails, for those that would allow the trails through their property, and I think you would find that a lot of that confusion and a lot of that pushback may go away.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think you were sitting in the chair a few days ago when I was actually speaking about Bill 100. I happened to mention that in my community of Kitchener Centre, the Walter Bean trail is quite outstanding—or perhaps it was a different member who was sitting in that day. But if you are ever in the area, I would encourage you to check out the Walter Bean trail in Kitchener Centre, which is just outstanding.

I'm happy to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Windsor West as we chat about the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, Bill 100. What I want to share with you are some comments from different stakeholders that we consulted as we were working on this particular bill.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario said to us that "Bill 100 will expand, improve and support Ontario's vast network of trails. The 20,000 kilometres of trails located in Ontario's municipalities support local economic development and tourism in rural, remote and urban communities. AMO's"—that's the Association of Municipalities of Ontario—"input is reflected in the new legislation."

We also got some very good comments from Chris Godwin and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. He said to us that the "Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, its 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs support ... Bill 100." So we have their support too.

Ken Whitbread and the Niagara Escarpment Commission—his comments are that he is supportive of Bill 100, including the six schedules.

And from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority—they're very supportive of the direction of Bill 100 and are encouraged by the proposed clarifications to the Occupiers' Liability Act, as this continues to be a major concern of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Thank you for those comments, and I'm pleased to speak to this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to stand and make some comments on Bill 100, known as the trails bill here. The government brought the bill in, gosh, over a year ago or so. We went to the presentation and, for sure, we wanted to encourage that more access to trails occurred in the province of Ontario. But then we have a large gap of time, and then Bill 100 comes to the floor for debate.

In the last few months, our critic here from Leeds–Grenville, who has done a great job for tourism and sport—he puts his hand up—has brought forward concerns, and I think we've all had them, especially in rural Ontario where we have a lot of snowmobile trails, about the part of the bill to do with easements, and justifiably so.

There are landowners who have had a good relationship with snowmobile clubs in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I have a little more snowmobiling occur in the Haliburton section of it. But the fact is that the bill needs to clarify this very grey area and that the easements should be voluntary. There was concern about transferability with the easements if the property changes hands.

It just created a very nervous on-the-ground feeling, to the point that some of the snowmobile trails were

blocked during the wintertime. None of us want to see that because, up in Haliburton county especially, it is a large, large part of our tourism industry. Like the old saying, it's white gold. They were very concerned that they would shut snowmobiles trails down and affect both the economic benefits we have from snowmobiling and the enjoyment that we have. Certainly, then there is a hesitation for people to come up to our riding.

What we heard is that the government really should have consulted some more. Hopefully, there will be an amendment to relieve some of the concerns that constituents in my riding have about the easement section of the trails bill.

I'll leave you with that. In theory it's great, but it needs a little bit of adjustment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to speak on behalf of the NDP caucus to the comments made by my friend from Windsor West. I know how much her family really enjoys getting to Algonquin Park every summer.

The member did talk about the Ojibway Prairie reserve in Windsor. When you guys come down to AMO in mid-August, I hope you'll have the opportunity to get out and visit some of our trails.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is a five-park system totalling 332 hectares. Ojibway has 160 species at risk: 20% of Ontario's species at risk and 32% of Canada's species at risk. It represents Canada's and the world's most endangered ecosystem. It has over 4,000 species living on that site: over 700 plant types, of which 100 are rare and 70 are in the prairie nature reserve; 3,000 insects—you won't get bitten, Speaker; 233 bird species, with breeding evidence for 71 species; and 16 mammals in the Ojibway park as well.

The member from Windsor West very correctly said that it's an ecosystem under siege at the moment. There is a big-box proposal. We've been reading petitions in the House, trying to get the government to preserve and protect that land, because it's an amazing part of the planet. Part of it could end up being a Walmart, as the member has said, or some other big box. They have already started cutting down the trees, which is unfortunate. It just breaks your heart, Speaker, when you see such a beautiful nature reserve falling under the loggers' chainsaws. It does damage to your soul as well as to the trees, Speaker.

I want to compliment the member for referencing that. It's in her riding, and she represents it well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I really stand up here as the MPP for Thunder Bay–Superior North, a northern guy who certainly could use a lot more than two minutes to talk about the importance of the trail system and the snowmobile system in the province, particularly in northern Ontario. We have got such a great story to tell in terms of the, I think, 30,000 kilometres of trails, in terms of snowmobile tracks all across the north and how important it is.

In fact, one of our former colleagues, Mike Brown, the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, used to do an annual snowmobile tour, which some of the members of the Legislature would know about, where he would take members of the Legislature on hundreds of kilometres of driving along our great snowmobile paths—a tremendous experience for so many of us. It was great.

We've got the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail along the North Shore of Lake Superior. For those of you who aren't familiar with it, it is a remarkable opportunity, by foot or by bike, to take a wonderful look at where many painters in the Group of Seven actually put these sites on canvas. That is really an important part of our culture and our recreation.

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That's why I think it's important that we actually bring forward this piece of legislation, the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act. The fact is, it will indeed help us better manage trail activity; it will help us protect public land and property by modernizing stewardship compliance and some of the enforcement tools. Those are important aspects as well.

But may I say, in terms of quickly responding to the member for Windsor West, there has been a significant opportunity for consultation. I'm very proud of the fact that a number of northern Ontario municipalities are supportive of this legislation. In fact, I have in front of me the resolution from the municipality of Greenstone that recognizes how important this legislation is and that last fall passed legislation to encourage the government to continue to work with all the municipal organizations—NOMA, ROMA and all those others—to support it. Certainly I support this legislation, and I hope that we're able to get it through the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Windsor West for final comments.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank the members from Kitchener Centre, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock—I think I got that one right—and Windsor–Tecumseh, and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines for adding their two minutes' worth to the debate.

I think it's important to note, Speaker, that our trails are a great opportunity to be used as outdoor classrooms. You will find that many schools are now trying to add naturalized areas to green space. I know that in Toronto that's a little more difficult, but down our way and in many other ridings, schools try to work naturalized areas into their green space around the buildings so that the kids get to learn about butterflies and bugs and birds and all kinds of things that, although you can learn about them in the classroom, you really need to experience to really understand and appreciate them. So I think that it's important that we protect our trails, that our trails are promoted and that everybody gets out to use them and see what they have to offer.

I want to speak directly to what the member from Kitchener Centre said. She stood up, like she's supposed to—she's told by their leadership—and gave all these

lovely lines about who they've consulted with and who is on board and that's fantastic. It's done in a way where it's meant to say, "We've listened to a bunch of people. Lots of people are on board. We've talked to lots of people, so therefore your arguments aren't valid."

In fact, their job is also to listen to the people who are saying, "I don't understand this. I have questions." It's their job to listen to us as we come forward with concerns from our constituents. They may have consulted, they may have some people who are on board. What they won't talk about is the people they have spoken to who aren't on board or who didn't understand what the legislation is. I think it's important that instead of reading the party line about what they have done, they listen to the people on this side of the room when we say that some people are confused and don't understand it. It's their job to make sure that it's clear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank all members for engaging in debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Huron–Bruce has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. I now recognize the member for Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: To be honest, Speaker, I wish I didn't have to stand today in this House to address this issue, but I, like many other Ontarians, expect the government to seriously consider matters of public concern. Quite frankly, the response that I got to my question last week was completely irresponsible. Far too often—and I have the perfect example to reference—this government simply responds to questions in this House with bluster, insults and essentially Liberal Party spin. Really and truly, this needs to stop. For the sake of our democracy, we cannot allow statements that stray far from the truth to be peddled in this House. Ontario taxpayers deserve to have the facts and that is why I wish to set the record straight today.

Last week, I asked the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change about the Financial Accountability Officer's testimony before committee. Mr. LeClair made a specific recommendation to improve transparency of the government's cap-and-trade scheme. I highlighted this recommendation and asked the minister why he was restricting the Financial Accountability Officer's access to documents related to the Liberals' cap-and-trade scheme. It was an easy question, Speaker, that required a straight-up answer, yet all I got was an incoherent, rambling response so full of misinformation that I don't think the minister's own colleagues could make sense of it.

What's worse, it contained outright misleading statements. In fact, there are three key examples—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: There are three key statements, which I would like to go through right now, that would lead people to think differently, and we have to correct that immediately.

First of all, the minister said, "I continually talk to the officers of this Legislature. We are performing at a higher standard than any other." However, that answer directly contradicts what the Financial Accountability Officer said in his testimony just the day before. Mr. LeClair testified, "My power to access information is subject to an exception which allows ministries to refuse my office access to cabinet records, including Treasury Board submissions."

Mr. LeClair continued in his testimony, saying, "I am becoming increasingly concerned that ministries are claiming that too wide a range of government information falls under the cabinet records exception."

When the Financial Accountability Officer of this Legislature says he is increasingly concerned with this government's lack of accountability, it is laughable for the environment minister to even suggest that he or any other member of cabinet is performing at a higher standard. The minister should do the right thing by retracting his statement from last week and then explaining to Ontarians how he will address Mr. LeClair's concerns.

Secondly, the minister claimed, "The parliamentary budget officer has not asked me nor ... asked this government for additional powers." Again, this statement is leaving a lot to be desired.

The Financial Accountability Officer specifically presented his concerns in his testimony before the Standing Committee on General Government, which has a majority of government members. He had said the government heard his testimony and is well aware of the concerns.

So again, the majority of the government has membership on the Standing Committee on General Government, and they, with their own ears, heard that what the minister implied was absolutely opposite to what the Financial Accountability Officer was claiming.

The third example of information that strays from the truth is this. The minister said, in response to my question—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Again, I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: The third example of how the minister can stray is in his response to my question, and that is: "The parliamentary budget officer has to review all spending plans before they're done and has very broad powers."

Again, this statement is nowhere close to being true, in the sense that the Financial Accountability Officer clearly stated in his testimony that he would likely be unable to access government documents that detail projects receiving money from the Liberals' cap-and-trade slush fund.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change has consulted widely on the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act. We took what we heard from those consultations and incorporated many of the ideas into our legislation. Before this House, we have a strong piece of legislation that would, if passed, set up a stable cap-and-trade system.

That being said, we have been open to listening to outside input through the committee stage. For example, we have worked closely with the New Democrats on real, tangible amendments that strengthen the legislation. And, as we respect and appreciate the work of the Financial Accountability Officer, we listened carefully to his presentation at committee. The government is looking to address the Financial Accountability Officer's concerns through the committee process going forward.

I do want to point out that there are already measures in the proposed legislation that address concerns about accountability. For example, the proposed legislation requires the government to annually report on funds tracked in and out of the greenhouse gas emission reduction account as well as provide a description of the initiatives which will be supported.

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The proposed legislation also sets out examples of initiatives that could be funded using proceeds from this account, including projects related to energy use, land use and buildings, infrastructure, transportation, industry, agriculture and forestry, waste management, education and training, and research and innovation.

The legislation would also require the government to prepare a climate change action plan detailing cost estimates for each action that is to be funded from the greenhouse gas reduction account; a timetable for when that action will begin and finish; the potential emission reductions resulting from the action; and the cost per tonne of potential reductions.

In closing, I want to reassure the member opposite that this proposed legislation will indeed ensure that every penny of the proceeds generated from cap-and-trade is accounted for and used to fight climate change. The government will report annually to the public online, starting in 2017, on how all cap-and-trade proceeds are being used to reduce Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Associate Minister of Long-Term Care. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has up to five minutes to reply.

I now recognize the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I asked the Premier yesterday a very specific question about funding for post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 64 years. The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care failed to answer this specific question, and instead spoke generally about increased funding for some physiotherapy services. In her reply, the associate health minister did not use the word "stroke" even once, even though that formed the exact crux of my question.

I referenced the case of Jim McEwen, a resident of Durham region and a stroke survivor under the age of 65 years. Mr. McEwen is a representative of thousands of people in this province who share a similar funding challenge, and my question was posed for the benefit of this larger group. Simply put, there is no OHIP-funded stroke treatment/physiotherapy services for post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 65.

To reiterate, one year ago, my predecessor, Christine Elliott, raised this issue in the House and asked the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to address this funding gap. Minister Hoskins at the time said, "My ministry for some time has been working on the precise issue that she has raised."

Speaker, one year has passed—one year—since the minister gave his reply in this House. In that one year, thousands of people have continued to suffer with this lack of funding. The physiotherapy services that we're talking about are fundamental to stroke recovery patients.

On April 2, 2015, Ms. Elliott introduced a motion in the House which stated in part that "the government of Ontario should take immediate steps to find the necessary in-year savings to extend post-stroke recovery services to those aged 20 through 64 years of age...."

The motion was debated, and on the same day—April 2, 2015—it carried.

In a discussion prior to the motion, Ms. Elliott rightly pointed out that research has found that frequent and consistent post-stroke community-based rehabilitation, like speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, can significantly enhance the health and mobility of patients. But effective treatment is time-sensitive, isn't it? Patients cannot be told, "Come back in 10 years, when you're 65." The time for treatment cannot be delayed, yet it is.

In Mr. McEwen's case, he was discharged and sent home from 12 days of outpatient care in 2010. When he asked for more publicly funded physiotherapy, he was told simply by his caseworker, "You're done. That's all you can get." Mr. McEwen realized then, like thousands

of other Ontario residents, the true depth of the trouble he was facing.

Yesterday, I asked whether the Premier and her government would start to satisfy the actual commitments that they had made in this very House one year ago. With respect, Speaker, the answer I received bore little relation to the question asked. It was generic, unspecific and completely unhelpful to the people who are demanding our assistance, care and support, and who are watching this afternoon.

The Ontario government has not introduced a bill to amend the Health Insurance Act or associated regulations with respect to this very issue.

There's no question that this is a problem requiring an immediate fix. What I was asking of the Premier yesterday was her assistance—her assistance—to satisfy a commitment made by her minister one year ago. In response to this simple question, I was met with compete obfuscation; in other words, "Let's make the answer disappear in language that speaks only to unrelated general policy and not"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, the question asked deserves a direct response. Mr. McEwen deserves a response, and all the stroke survivors in this province who share his circumstance deserve and need a response.

The question is simple: Will this government take appropriate steps to ensure that all post-stroke patients, regardless of age, have access to sufficient rehabilitation services?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care now has up to five minutes to reply.

Minister?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member from Whitby–Oshawa for his advocacy and his passion on the issue, and I also appreciate the opportunity to give a more fulsome answer, as I believe this question does deserve a fulsome answer.

If this House indulges me, I'd like to begin by talking about the care path for a post-acute-phase stroke-recovery patient in Ontario. Regardless of age—that's really important, I want to emphasize—the post-acute phase of stroke recovery that's offered in Ontario has five settings.

The first one, as you can imagine, is in the hospital: in-patient beds covered by OHIP. In-patient rehabilitation and complex continuing care beds are used to treat patients of all ages who require hospital-based post-acute stroke care. In-patient rehabilitation beds provide supports for patients who require hospital care to reverse functional decline following an injury, illness or medical intervention, including the impact of a stroke.

After the patient is discharged, there's a number of options available to the patient to ensure that rehabilitative services are continued.

The first is hospital outpatient clinics. A number of hospitals offer outpatient clinics and hospital day programs for post-acute stroke patients of all ages. These ambulatory programs generally follow an interdisciplinary, team-based approach. Each clinic program has its own eligibility criteria.

Next, the Rehabilitative Care Alliance, an advisory body established by the 14 LHINs, including representatives from hospitals, the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres, the Ontario Long Term Care Association and many other key stakeholders, is in the process of developing a plan for an outpatient data collection and reporting system for hospital-based outpatient rehabilitation services, which would include stroke care and speaks to the ongoing work that we are doing in the area of enhancing services for post-stroke patients.

After the hospital outpatient clinics, or if the person isn't well enough to go for ambulatory care, we also provide rehabilitative services in the home, the in-home care. In-home physiotherapy services are provided to patients of all ages, including post-acute stroke patients who are unable to access these services in settings outside their home.

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Some more options include the Convalescent Care Program in long-term-care homes. The Convalescent Care Program, CCP, is a short-stay program in long-term-care homes, again for persons of all ages, including post-acute stroke patients who need time to recover strength, endurance or functioning.

Finally, there's the option of the community physiotherapy clinic program. This last setting provides targeted physiotherapy aimed at addressing acute incidents. That includes post-stroke patients who, regardless of age, can, in community physiotherapy clinics, access rehabilitative care that's OHIP-covered. There are currently 258 community physiotherapy clinics providing services in over 150 communities across Ontario.

I also want to address, in addition to some of these programs, some of the work that the ministry is working on on this very important issue.

There is a pilot taking place that is really important, in which the ministry, together with its partners, is committed to strengthening post-acute care pathways for persons who have suffered a stroke, and it supports a number of initiatives to provide stroke rehabilitation services to Ontarians. This initiative is called the Health System Funding Reform, which is a patient-centred, evidence-informed funding model that reflects local population needs and strengthens the link between high-quality care and fiscal sustainability.

One of the key levers is the implementation of quality-based procedures. Quality-based procedures are health services with clusters of patients, again of all ages, with clinically related diagnoses, treatments and functional needs.

Mr. Speaker, I see I'm running out of time, although I do have a lot more that I'd like to cover. But I hope that this more fulsome answer reassures the member opposite (a) of the care pathways that are already in place, and (b) that the ministry is indeed working on further steps to ensure that post-stroke recovery patients in Ontario get the care they need and deserve.

WIND TURBINES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

I now recognize the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I rise to give notice of dissatisfaction with the answer provided to my question yesterday by the Minister of the Environment.

In the first place, I probably shouldn't be shocked, because the question didn't pertain to anything that the Minister of the Environment could actually answer. The Premier only called upon him to answer it either because she couldn't answer it herself or she couldn't hand it off to the minister who actually could.

The Minister of the Environment has no ability to extend an energy contract, which was the basis of the question, so he couldn't really speak to that. The Minister of the Environment has no ability to tell the House what the milestone date for the FIT contract given to wpd in the spring of 2010 actually is. If he does, that would have been information relevant to the question yesterday. If he has it, he can gladly share it with the House, and we would appreciate that today.

So I wondered why the minister rose to answer the question. Yes, the Environmental Review Tribunal granted a stay of construction on the project on the south shore of Prince Edward county, but the question wasn't about the stay of construction. Though it's worth noting that an environmental review has focused largely on the habitat of the Blanding's turtle—as this minister knows, a species that this government has invested millions into habitats in Scarborough to protect—the failure to grant an immediate stay of construction caused a disturbance of hibernation and destruction of habitat for those same turtles in Prince Edward county. That alone could prove what the Ministry of Natural Resources' own experts said at an ERT: that this project will cause irreversible harm to this species.

However, that was still not the substance of the question. The stay of construction was granted and the construction has stopped for now. The substance of the question was whether or not the Minister of Energy would extend wpd's deadline another year, or as long as necessary to get that project into the ground. Only he can do that. The IESO can just as easily use the force majeure clause to get taxpayers out of this environmentally catastrophic contract once the milestone date has passed. All this, the government knows.

What I find remarkable in this case is the degree to which no one in government takes responsibility for anything. The Minister of Energy signs a contract for a process that then goes to the Ministry of Natural Resources, which has to issue a kill, harm and harass permit. The minister doesn't have to sign said permit, but does even though his own in-house expert on turtles tells him this will destroy their habitat. So much for evidence-based decision-making.

The project then goes over to the Ministry of the Environment, which runs the Environmental Review Tribunal. The ERT hears days of evidence and arguments from lawyers both for the big wind developer and the non-profit community group in Prince Edward county trying to protect their own environment. The ERT rules that the project will cause irreversible harm to the environment. It actually ruled that either project planned for the south shore would cause harm, but that's beside the point.

So the developers dig into their pockets and hire lawyers. Does the government join the case of the community group? No, the government joins the multinational wind developer trying to do irreversible damage to the environment. Then the Minister of the Environment has the nerve to get up and sound offended because I dared to suggest that something about this situation doesn't smell right.

In preparation for this debate, I asked members of the community to tell me what they would like me to ask the minister here this evening, and here's what one member wrote back:

"The community of Prince Edward has now experienced over 60 days of hearings for two wind energy projects before the Environmental Review Tribunal (with perhaps more to come) plus appeals at the Divisional Court and Court of Appeal.

"All of these proceedings have reaffirmed what many community members as well as provincial and national environmental groups have known for some time; for many reasons the undeveloped south shore of Prince Edward county is the wrong site for this type and scale of wind energy projects.

"In addition many observers have been shocked during these hearings by the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change legal team defending the proponent's positions—seemingly the MOECC arguing for the destruction of the local environment.

"Two separate environmental review tribunals have now found that adjacent projects will cause serious and irreversible harm to the natural environment. In spite of these findings the current process seems unable to prevent this type of poorly located development from proceeding or resulting in years of litigation....

"Can the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change find a method to interject some responsible management and improve credibility to this process? Can

the minister not find a method to stop proposed projects that have been found to be so poorly sited?"

To quote the seminal political question: Who benefits?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I now turn it over to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. You have up to five minutes to reply.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for his question.

Let's just deal with the top issue. The member, during question period, suggested that fundraising activities by the governing party were somehow influencing this process. That was the accusation that was laid. Let's just break this down; this was my first answer on the record. It is pretty much impossible if you actually understand what the roles are. The ERT is independent. I can't involve myself in directing it, setting the time frame for it or influencing it. I cannot, should not, and I hope the member would protect that. Whatever political activities or fundraising activities—to suggest that one minister, either I or the Minister of Energy, should insert ourselves in a way that would distort that process or create favour to anybody then would create legitimacy to that accusation.

Number two, there are director's decisions. In law, I cannot interfere with, nor can I direct, a director's decision. It is illegal and inappropriate. I cannot direct funding. I cannot do any of those things.

I will say that I've had 30 years of public service. I've been CEO of private corporations and that. I have learned that there are 107 members in here. I have never met one yet who wasn't of goodwill, who wasn't honest, who didn't know the right thing to do and try to do the right thing. When people have been caught up in making mistakes, or have been in conflict with the law or the rules of this House, I have yet to see any member in any party ever do that maliciously.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that living through this House in the last two weeks, I've never seen a more denigrating process, which has assassinated more people's character on all sides—

Mr. Todd Smith: You were here for the gas plant scandal. Look what happened there.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I did not interrupt the member once and listened carefully. He asked for some answers.

I think I've explained how the ERT system works. I want the Environmental Review Tribunal to go through this process properly. I know the Minister of Energy also wants that to be a protected independent process.

If there are appeals to me and there are limited grounds, I want to make sure that the House has confidence in my judgement and my ability, that I have not taken sides nor stated or in any way expressed favour to either side in the discussion, and any decision that I may end up having to make, I can make in clear conscience and have clearly demonstrated to be such. So I'm going to be very careful not to express views on that.

The process, as I said, remains separate from the MOECC process, but he asked the question about the Ministry of Energy, and I'm quite happy because for the Minister of Energy, one of us tries to cover off and we try to get answers. The IESO is strictly responsible for offering, executing and managing the contractual relationships with feed-in tariff or FIT project proponents. The government of Ontario is not the counterparty to FIT contracts and is not in the position to discuss matters related to individual FIT contracts. I have been informed that the Ministry of Energy has entertained requests for extensions to individual project deadlines, and the minister will not consider directing the IESO to grant an extension for an individual FIT contract.

Furthermore, the government has a strict policy of non-interference where individual FIT contracts are concerned. This is critically important in order to maintain the integrity and fairness of the FIT program as a standard-offer program.

I know that the opposition member has raised the issue of milestone dates for this project. It is important to note that milestone dates for FIT contracts are commercially confidential information and we are not at liberty to discuss them in the Legislature. However, there are numerous factors that could impact the milestone dates of an individual FIT contract. These factors are contractually agreed to by the IESO and the counterparty in the original FIT contract.

I hope the member opposite fully understands that there will be no interference from the Ministry of Energy in the management of individual FIT contracts to which the IESO is the counterparty.

I think that clearly explains the IESO process with the FIT contract and explains the ERT process. The Minister of Energy's job is to protect the integrity and not politicize that process.

Mr. Speaker, I really mean this very sincerely: We are honourable members here. On city councils, you are not allowed to attribute motive. If you attribute motive to an honourable member—I know my friend from Whitby–Oshawa would know this—you are removed by the Speaker in most councils. We have seen nothing but attribution of motive, and I have 30 years of integrity. I have never been involved in a scandal—I am not a wealthy person—nor has the member opposite.

I want to conclude simply by saying that we will protect the integrity of the process, and I hope the member opposite will as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1833.

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