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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 12 December 2006

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 12 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

ESTIMATES

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have a message from the administrator of the government of Ontario, signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The administrator of the government of Ontario transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2007, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House today to mention more examples of the reckless and uncontrolled spending revealed in the most recent Auditor General's report. Quite frankly, I would just like to review the independent comments being made in the media, just to mention the headlines that this is worthy of receiving:

"Province to Check Hydro One Spending: McGuinty Vows Greater Oversight after Utility's CEO Gets \$3-million Payout" on his severance. The next headline is, "Grits Vow to Rein in Hydro After Boss Leaves with \$3-million Payout." The next headline: "Grits Kill \$1.6-billion Surplus" and go on a spending spree of \$640 million in about a three-hour cabinet meeting. Next headline: "Former Hydro One Chief Drove Luxury Cars on Corporate Tab." The next headline: "Ontario Power Rules Out Gifts for Employees," a little bit too little, too late.

If you want to look at more independent comment, let's look at the Auditor General's report. This report summarizes a number of ministries' misuse of public taxpayers' money. What did they say on health and long-term care? "However, for the program to cost-effectively fulfill its mandate," action is required. These are the auditor's words. He says, "The ministry had still not assessed the relationship between the volumes of services provided by individual facilities and the cost of providing such services to determine whether the facility fees paid to independent health facilities were reasonable."

This report is a damning—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): This past summer the city of Toronto, through the leadership of its utility, Toronto Hydro, demonstrated the impact conservation programs can have. Toronto Hydro's demand response programs managed to reduce Toronto energy consumption at peak times while, in contrast, energy usage in the rest of the province rose to new heights.

Toronto Hydro was the only Ontario utility to target reduction of peak energy use. What it managed to accomplish in the first year of rolling out demand response programs on a very limited scale can be expanded upon with the proviso that the government revamp its energy policy so that energy efficiency and demand response are at the centre, not a sidebar.

The success of Toronto Hydro's programs highlights how the Liberal allocation of three quarters of a billion dollars to the Portlands Energy Centre, a mega power plant that will reindustrialize the city's waterfront, is anachronistic and misguided. Expand demand response, combine that with unharnessed resources and energy efficiency and demand response, and you can make a huge difference to the energy situation in Toronto.

This government needs to invest in and focus on energy efficiency and conservation and abandon its anachronistic approach to electricity.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): There is no question that 2006 was an extremely difficult year for my constituents in the Thunder Bay–Superior North riding. As the forestry sector continued to face enormous challenges on a daily basis, the pressure on all elected officials to find solutions for the industry and the communities we represent became a constant and consuming task.

It is with that in mind that I'm taking the opportunity today to thank our municipal representatives who worked so hard over the past three years to fight against the tide that battered our community. I also want to welcome the mayors, reeves and councillors who have been elected to join this battle for survival for the next four years and to commit to them that I will use all the resources at my disposal as a member of the government to work with them to see the economy turn around.

The fact is—

Applause.

Mr. Gravelle: Thank you—that no community in my riding went unscathed. While we had some triumphs,

notably the reopening of the mill in Terrace Bay and the avoidance of a shutdown at Buchanan Northern Hardwoods in Thunder Bay, there were still several shattering blows to our economy.

So as we move into 2007, I look forward to working closely with our municipal leaders in all the communities in the Thunder Bay–Superior North riding to find ways to reopen mills that are indefinitely shut down, to keep mills open that have successfully fought against the tide and to seek out opportunities for new investments in north-western Ontario. It is by working together that we can overcome these challenges, and working together we will to not just survive, but to thrive in the future.

CITY OF NORTH BAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): What do the McGuinty Liberals have against North Bay? Earlier this year, the Premier popped into North Bay long enough to show the media and those in attendance that he doesn't know the difference between the gateway to the north and Sudbury.

Then last week we had the Premier's right-hand man, the finance minister, Greg Sorbara, going out of his way to say that the skiing in North Bay was not very good, despite the fact that he was not aware they had a ski hill at all. Needless to say, the people of North Bay are none too pleased.

Myself, John Tory and the entire PC caucus know just how wonderful the city of North Bay is. I'm happy to enlighten the finance minister about the grassroots success that is the Laurentian ski hill. The Laurentian ski hill is, in fact, not owned by Doug Newell, as the finance minister seems to believe. Mr. Newell is the hard-working general manager. It is the North Bay–Mattawa Conservation Authority that owns the ski hill. It was saved by a community campaign two years ago, a campaign led by Al McDonald, someone whom I know, and the people in Nipissing know, works very hard every day for the people of North Bay.

As a perfect end to a sad display, the minister, in his remarks, turned down an offer to go to North Bay to actually experience the Laurentian ski hill. All I can say is that it's a shame. Visiting North Bay and experiencing all that it has to offer is never a hardship, and I can assure the people of North Bay that I will be making another visit on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party very soon, and I encourage all Ontarians to make the trip to North Bay.

1340

FAMILY DOCTORS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I recently attended the opening of the first family medicine teaching unit at Credit Valley Hospital. Four residents from the University of Toronto's postgraduate program are now training at Credit Valley's family medicine teaching unit to become family physicians. In a few years, 18 resi-

dents will be enrolled, and all will be serving Mississauga families.

Ontario has been working to increase access to family doctors in western Mississauga. The best way to ensure that we have the right number and the right type of doctors to serve our community is to train young doctors right in our community. That medical farm system is exactly what Credit Valley's family medicine teaching unit is doing. After two years of residency at Credit Valley Hospital, many of these residents will have roots in our community and will set up their permanent practices in western Mississauga.

This is not just an innovative way but the right way to increase capacity in Ontario's health care system. By increasing the number of doctors in the Mississauga community, western Mississauga residents will get greater access to health care services when and where they need it. The family medicine teaching unit is just one of the ways that Ontario is working with the Credit Valley Hospital to bring more doctors to serve our growing western Mississauga community—a commitment made and a commitment kept.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): One of the most offensive and deceptive practices by government departments is ramming through what's left of their budget before year-end to hide the fact that there's a surplus. Now the Auditor General has revealed that the McGuinty cabinet played that game with \$1.6 billion of taxpayers' money at the end of the last fiscal year. "None of these transfers ... had been included in the government's budget for the 2005-06 fiscal year, and in many cases, normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated..." That according to the Auditor General.

This smoke-and-mirrors bookkeeping leaves the false impression that the government spent \$1.6 billion on public services when in fact none of it was spent. This helter-skelter, thoughtless and offensive shell game to hide \$1.6 billion was going on at the same time as ministers were telling us in this House that there is no money for autistic children, no money for special-needs programs in our schools, for home care for the elderly or for residency positions for foreign-trained doctors.

Just because cabinet ministers played fast and loose with taxpayers' dollars and the fact that it took place in the cabinet office makes it no less offensive than what took place at Hydro One. Perhaps the Premier should be held accountable in the same way that Tom Parkinson was held accountable for his offensive behaviour.

TOYS FOR TOTS

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Toys for Tots campaign that is run in Thunder Bay by the Thunder Bay Professional Fire Fighters Association. Specifically, I would like to thank its chairman, Bob Vander Ploeg, for

his leadership and hard work. Toys for Tots is an initiative to ensure that all children who are less fortunate receive a gift on Christmas Day.

Toys for Tots has been very successful in our community. This initiative is almost 50 years old and is made possible through countless hours of volunteer work that is provided by off-duty firefighters. It receives considerable support from our generous citizens and from local businesses like Abitibi-Consolidated, its longest-running sponsor. The outstanding donation of 2005 was from MGM Electric. In partnership with their employees, customers and suppliers, the company raised \$8,000, for a remarkable total of over \$60,000 since 1997. That support is also mirrored by our school boards, service clubs, labour unions and many other groups who organize unique fundraising projects and contribute their proceeds to the firefighters' campaign.

In fact, since 1973 Toys for Tots has raised more than \$1.6 million. Last year the campaign raised \$99,000 and used it to coordinate a city-wide mobilization of volunteers to fill and distribute hampers filled with food, including a turkey dinner, to less fortunate families in our community.

"Christmas wishes can come true ... Thanks to you" is the motto of Toys for Tots, and that spirit is front and centre in the Toys for Tots 2001 video history, which was produced by firefighter John Doughty, a 17-year veteran of the Thunder Bay local.

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I would like to bring to the attention of my colleagues the wonderful service provided by the students of Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West, a school in my riding that I was proud to attend last Saturday. They held a holiday dinner last weekend for people of low income in our community and served over 130 people, the most they have ever served in their eight-year history of providing this dinner.

The Northumberland Youth Advisory Council worked in partnership with the high school, providing a donation of food, including the donation of an entire pig, and got the word out about this great event.

I would ask that my colleagues join me in showing our appreciation for the hard work and the amazing effort of this group of volunteers. I would like to thank Mr. Paul Hicks and Taylor's meats for their generous donation, as well as the Northumberland Youth Advisory Council and staff and students at CDCI West for their continued support of community activities. They have worked very hard for the betterment of our community, and it's initiatives like this one that make Northumberland and Ontario an even better place to live.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I rise in the House today to commend the students of Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School in Orléans for their compassion and generosity this Christmas season.

For 11 years, the students at this school have reached out to those in our community who are in need, making

sure that they have a happy and joyful holiday like everyone else.

One of the caring actions taken by these students is the toy mountain campaign that they have run every Christmas season for more than a decade. They are the only school in the city to run a toy mountain campaign right inside their school. Last year, these students collected 400 toys to brighten the holidays for impoverished children. This year, their ambitions are higher; they hope to donate 500 toys.

Their generosity doesn't end there. The multicultural club at this school has organized additional efforts to help those who are struggling to make ends meet. This club is having each class in the school put together one or two Christmas hampers for families in need. These hampers will include a Christmas turkey, other seasonal food items and toys for each of the children in the needy families. Some of the students will even help the Caldwell family service agency and the Odawa Native Friendship Centre to distribute the hampers.

I commend these students for caring and for their generosity. These students exemplify the holiday spirit. I commend them for giving the best Christmas gift of all.

VISITORS

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sure members of the assembly will want to join me in welcoming a good friend of mine from my alma mater, Dr. Henry Jacek, and 14 of his students from his fourth-year political science class and the master's program.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would encourage members to join me in welcoming the new mayor of the municipality of Clarington, Jim Abernethy, who is in the Speaker's gallery along with his lovely wife, Cathy, as well as my wife, Peggy, my executive assistant, Sheryl, and my mother-in-law, Elizabeth Woods.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce to the House a gallery full—and some sitting up there as well—of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas to the House this afternoon.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to welcome Jeff Gillan, executive director of Corso Italia BIA in my riding. He's right over there.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ

Mr. Smitherman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à améliorer les systèmes de santé en modifiant ou en abrogeant divers textes de loi et en édictant certaines lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll defer to ministerial statements.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (DIRECT ELECTION OF DURHAM REGIONAL COUNCIL CHAIR), 2006 LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (ÉLECTION AU SCRUTIN GÉNÉRAL DU PRÉSIDENT DU CONSEIL RÉGIONAL DE DURHAM)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide for the direct election of the Durham Regional Council chair / Projet de loi 172, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir l'élection au scrutin général du président du conseil régional de Durham.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): The bill adds a section to the Municipal Act, 2001, that requires the head of council of the regional municipality of Durham to be directly elected. This being the second time I've introduced this bill, it now has the support of the city of Oshawa as well as the municipalities of Ajax and Pickering, as those communities have held referendums in the last municipal election, having over 86% support in

Oshawa and over 89% support to move forward on the issue in Ajax and Pickering.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): What about the minimum wage? What about the child benefit claw-back? What about the disability pension?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Niagara Centre will come to order. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I will not warn the member for Niagara Centre again.

Mr. Kormos: It's embarrassing. You throw a quarter to—

The Speaker: I name the member for Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos.

Mr. Kormos was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1354 to 1359.

The Speaker: Would members please take their seats. Order. I can wait.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Peterson, Tim
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shaffiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Kular, Kuldeep	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Bountrogianni, Marie	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Levac, Dave	Runciman, Robert W.
Broten, Laurel C.	MacLeod, Lisa	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Chudleigh, Ted	McNeely, Phil	Sterling, Norman W.
Colle, Mike	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.

Crozier, Bruce	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Tory, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Watson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	Munro, Julia	Wilkinson, John
Duncan, Dwight	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Christine	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Parsons, Ernie	Yakabuski, John
Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri	Martel, Shelley
Hampton, Howard	Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 78; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Our province is only as strong as our democracy, and the strength of our democracy depends on the quality of the individuals elected to serve in this chamber.

The Integrity Commissioner cited this principle in his recent report on MPPs' compensation. The Honourable Coulter Osborne concluded that it is in the public interest to ensure that such compensation be fair, that it reflect the important responsibilities of MPPs, and that it not fall so far behind the compensation paid our federal counterparts as to risk having the provincial Legislature seen as a farm team for the House of Commons.

I am today introducing legislation that will bring MPPs' salaries to within 25% of their federal counterparts' salaries. This legislation will also increase the contribution to an MPP's registered pension plan from 5% to 10% of salary. That's about 75% less than what taxpayers pay towards an average MP's pension.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the appointment of the acting chief medical officer of health.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the appointment of the acting chief medical officer of health. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

"To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

"We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now

assembled, request the appointment of Dr. George Pasut as the acting chief medical officer of health for the province of Ontario as provided in section 81(1) of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, RSO 1990, chapter H.7 and section 28(1) of the Interpretation Act, RSO 1990, chapter I.11, to hold office for a six-month term, having all the same powers and duties of the chief medical officer of health under the Health Protection and Promotion Act; and

"That the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker."

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

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1407 to 1412.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 261. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Ramal, Khalil
Bartolucci, Rick	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bentley, Christopher	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Bountrogianni, Marie	Leal, Jeff	Runciman, Robert W.
Bradley, James J.	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Brotten, Laurel C.	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Bryant, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Caplan, David	McMeekin, Ted	Sterling, Norman W.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chudleigh, Ted	Meilleur, Madeleine	Tascona, Joseph N.
Colle, Mike	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Crozier, Bruce	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duncan, Dwight	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Elliott, Christine	Parsons, Ernie	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard	Zimmer, David
Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve	
Gravelle, Michael	Peterson, Tim	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri	Martel, Shelley
Horwath, Andrea	Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 76; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEALTH CARE

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I rise in the House today to speak about our government's proposed health system improvements bill. If passed, this significant and far-reaching legislation would bring about much-needed change in a number of areas in Ontario's health care system.

We've drafted this bill because we want to ensure we give the people of this province greater access to more health care professions, usher in a new era in public health, better protect public safety, and bring more accountability and transparency to the system. With this bill, we will proceed with our agenda for positive change, historic changes first felt here in the Legislature where we are joined today by a multitude of stakeholders who will see themselves and their colleagues reflected in laws that we have had the privilege here to debate.

But make no mistake: Today's bill, if passed, includes changes that are about all of us, changes to keep us healthy, changes to help us if we are really sick. Our bill is a comprehensive one. This simply reflects the complexity of our health care system.

Since coming into office three years ago, our government has not shied away from doing the necessary work to build the system we all refer to, to ensure that the many cogs of our health care system are integrated, to deliver quality care for patients. We were elected to transform the system for the better, and while much has been done by so many in the last three years, our work continues.

Now on to some of the specific changes.

In 2004, in a rare act of unanimity, this Legislature acted to suspend a medical audit system that had lost the respect of Ontario's doctors. Under the guidance of former Supreme Court Justice Mr. Peter Cory, and in lockstep with our partners at the Ontario Medical Association, today's bill introduces a medical review process that will restore doctors' confidence in the fairness of the audit system and provide the public with accountability for doctors' payments.

I'm so pleased to see Dr. David Bach and others from the Ontario Medical Association, who represent Ontario's doctors so well, and I'm glad to welcome them to the Ontario Legislature today. They're in the west public gallery.

In 2003, 44 of our Ontarians were lost to SARS. As the government that followed, we've dedicated ourselves

to learning and applying all lessons and advice of leaders named Campbell, Naylor and Walker.

This bill would establish the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. An independent agency, modelled like the Centers for Disease Control, our agency would bring together academic, clinical and government experts to create a centre of public health excellence in Ontario—public health excellence to keep us well in the first place, and excellence to maximize our protection against known threats and those not yet identified.

No one has been more dedicated to the health of Ontarians than Dr. Sheela Basrur, who is here today in the Legislature with her family. She has been a driving force behind the proposal for this agency, along with other professionals who have worked with her, including people like Terry Sullivan from Cancer Care Ontario and Dr. Michael Christian. They are both with us here today, and they have our thanks as well.

Next, this bill moves to broaden the scope of practice of existing regulated health professionals, brings four new groups under self-government and streamlines the complaints process addressing the concerns of patients.

1420

Specifically, this bill would expand the scope of practice for optometrists, for dental hygienists and pharmacists. Patients would have increased access to services through the safe and appropriate use of these health care providers. This proposal is based on the advice from the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council. Barbara Sullivan, HPRAC's chair, is with us in the east members' gallery.

Our government recognizes that the current process for deciding which drugs can be prescribed by nurse practitioners and some other providers is limiting and cumbersome. That's why this legislation proposes categorizing drugs and then working with the key stakeholders to develop a better approvals process. Again, it is the patient who will benefit as they will have greater access to appropriate care.

We also know that health care providers working in teams can increase patient satisfaction. This new legislation will make the encouragement of team-based care models a basic element of the regulatory college's mandate. As well, through this bill, the regulatory colleges will be able to collect and share key information about the health care workforce to help the government and our partners, in order to be able to make sure that we have the right number of health care providers today and in the future to meet the needs of Ontarians.

I'd like to recognize these individuals, but they represent a much larger group of people. I'd like to recognize specifically Alison Dantas from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, Fran Richardson of the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, Naseema Siddiqui of the Coalition of Mental Health Professionals, Gerry Cook of the Ontario College of Pharmacists, and Irwin Fefergrad of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons, who have all worked with the government on this bill.

For years Ontarians have had the benefit of a world-leading air ambulance service staffed by dedicated, highly trained paramedics. By adding critical care land ambulances in designated Ontario communities, Ornge, the new name of our service, will be able to extend their high-calibre care to many of our sickest patients. Patients win, and hospitals and municipal land ambulance services in places like Sudbury will have their loads lightened.

I'd like to recognize Dr. Chris Mazza, the president and CEO of Ornge. He's in the east members' gallery.

Chase McEachern passed away from a heart condition at the age of 11. In his lifetime, though brief, Chase raised awareness about publicly accessible defibrillators. The Chase McEachern act would protect most individuals from civil liability for any damages that might occur from the use of a portable defibrillator in an emergency. This measure builds on the dedicated efforts of our colleague Bruce Crozier, the MPP for Essex, who brought forward a private member's bill with the same objectives.

Each year in Ontario about 6,500 people suffer from cardiac arrest. We know that defibrillators can increase survival rates by up to 50%. Thanks to the good work of people like Chase McEachern and organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Mikey Network, who work hard to get more defibs into Ontario communities, more Ontarians will have a fighting chance of survival and recovery. I applaud their efforts and hope that everyone will join with me in recognizing Chase McEachern's family, who are here in the east members' gallery with us today.

As I said at the outset, these are the highlights of our government's proposed Health System Improvements Act. Ultimately, what's important to bear in mind is the wealth of improvements this bill would bring for Ontario's patients. The proposed legislation is part of our government's overall plan for innovation in health care and for building a health care system that delivers on three crucial priorities: keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to nurses and to doctors. I look forward to the passage of our proposed Health System Improvements Act.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Today I rise on a very historic day for the province of Ontario. Today mandatory retirement is eliminated in this province.

A little over a year ago, this Legislature voted to end mandatory retirement. At that time, a one-year transition period was included to give Ontarians time to get ready for the change.

On December 12 last year, the Lieutenant Governor gave royal assent, and so today, one year later, there is no more mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario.

It was the right thing to do one year ago, it's the right thing to do today and it's the right thing to do for today's society.

The journey to ending mandatory retirement began in June 2001 when the Ontario Human Rights Commission released a paper entitled *Time for Action: Advancing Human Rights for Older Ontarians*. In it, the commission stated that mandatory retirement policies undermine the dignity and sense of self-worth of older workers.

I want to thank people like Keith Norton, Mike Colle, Carl DeFaria, Chris Bentley, Lillian and Murray Morgenthau, co-founders of CARP and, as advocates for this legislation.

Premier McGuinty demonstrated very clear leadership and made it very clear that he did not want to have a policy that undermines the dignity and sense of self-worth of a large segment of our population. It wasn't fair, it wasn't right, and today it no longer exists.

Today, we are here to give Ontarians freedom, the freedom to choose to retire or not retire at the age of 65. Today, we are here to say to people all across this province, "Do you want to continue to work?" Well, now you can. "Do you want to continue to contribute in the workplace?" Well, now you can. "Do you want to continue to earn your livelihood?" Well, now you can.

Today, the law puts an end to mandatory retirement, and that takes effect here in the province of Ontario. Today, thousands of Ontarians will have the choice of whether or not to retire; that choice will be theirs to make. Starting today, citizens of this province will be able to decide for themselves whether or not to continue working past the age of 65. Some may ask, "Why would they want to work past the age of 65?" For many reasons: Some workers decide to retire based on lifestyle, circumstances and priorities—the decision may be personal or practical—and some people want to continue working because they want to continue working. As of today, they have that right.

People today are living longer, more active lives. Many people still have a keen interest in their working lives. They believe they still have much to contribute. As of today, they have that right.

The age of 65 was an artificial construct—it always was. Winston Churchill was born in 1874. That means that he turned 65 in 1939, at the very start of World War II. Still ahead lay for him the brilliant leadership of Britain during that war. It's probably a good thing that the British public didn't say to him, "Okay, Mr. Churchill, you're 65. It's time to step aside."

Are we to say to Margaret Atwood, who turned 65 in 2004, "That's enough; put down your pen; no more writing for you"?

For ongoing influence and significance we only have to look to the city of Mississauga and the enthusiastic, fireball mayor, Hazel McCallion. She is 85 years old. This past November, the residents elected her to her 11th term. They clearly recognized in Mississauga that age was not a factor.

Astronaut John Glenn orbited the earth in 1962. In 1998, he went back into space aboard the space shuttle at the age of 77.

The sum of 65 years does not mean it's over.

Employers' and employees' organizations have spoken to me about their concern over a coming workforce shortage. The end of mandatory retirement now gives them access to a highly trained, highly motivated new source of labour. They can tap into their own employees. This is a good thing for employers, this is a good thing for employees and it is the right thing to do.

Human rights in this province have taken a great step forward today. Today, we are seeing Ontario adapt to changes in our society. Today, we are fulfilling the promise we made. Today, there is no more mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): In 2003, the Progressive Conservative government introduced an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code to eliminate the last vestige of state discrimination in Ontario, that of age. Three long years later, the McGuinty government followed that lead, effective today.

The Progressive Conservative caucus, under the leadership of John Tory, wishes well any senior who takes advantage of their new freedom to work and share their valuable experience with our community, province and country.

1430

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm going to respond to the health legislation. Obviously we're very pleased that this legislation has been introduced. Many of these recommendations are long overdue, whether it's dealing with the public health agency or the Cory report or the response to HPRAC. So we are pleased that the legislation is here today.

Having said that, I think the first thing that causes some great concern is the fact that this is an omnibus bill. As somebody said to me, it is a monster bill. It is immense. I think it has caught many people by surprise in that it amends 42 diverse acts. Certainly the packaging and the scope of the legislation is very surprising. The legislation probably has the potential to involve the largest number of stakeholders ever in any bill.

I have some concerns about the timing. We are nine months away from an election and I really wonder if the government has introduced it so late that there's no intention for it to pass before that time. I think it's really important that we take a look at what is contained in here and, if we're going to protect the public, that we do allow the public ample opportunity to analyze this bill. It is huge.

I know the minister has highlighted some of the main points, but in any omnibus bill you also have to be very suspicious as to what may be contained therein that has not been carefully analyzed or—

Interjection.

Mrs. Witmer: You're right.

Anyway, let me begin first with the Cory report. This report was released in April 2005. We've not had an

audit system in place since that time. If this bill does not pass in the spring and it's held over until the next election, it's going to be almost three years. The Minister of Health promised a response by the summer of 2005 and now we're seeing it about 18 months later. The response is actually buried in this extremely huge bill. I do believe that report deserved a more timely response. Of course, the Auditor General just recently spoke to that as well and he criticized the lack of an audit system in his report.

The new public health agency: We've heard many experts over the past few years indicate the need for this agency. We have this recommendation now for an agency, but there is little meat on the bone. We know that we don't have enough health professionals in Ontario at the present time. We're now going to be requiring more individuals, so this is certainly a huge concern. By the time this agency is set up, it's going to be beyond what a spokesperson for the minister said at one time, that this was going to be up and running in short order.

If we take a look at the fact that a lot of our public health units—in fact, 12 of the 36—are without a full-time medical officer of health, it just emphasizes the fact that we don't have the human resources to staff what is being proposed here. We are not at the present time appropriately staffed and resourced and fully integrated with the rest of Ontario's health system.

If you take a look at HPRAC, HPRAC came out with a huge 300-page report and now the responses to that report are buried in this huge bill. We just spent a lot of time on one college and now we're going to spend very little time—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Responses? The member for Hamilton East.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have to say I'm responding to the Minister of Labour's marking of the ban on mandatory retirement today. I still have to try to figure out in my mind why it was so absolutely necessary to make this a priority. In fact, the minister used Margaret Atwood as an example of someone who might be turning 65 and all of a sudden her pen is going to have to drop. That's just passing strange because we know there are many Canadian authors who have been—actually, some even started their career after the age of 65. So we know darn well that he was really being facetious when trying to indicate that the ban on mandatory retirement is going to have anything to do with people like Margaret Atwood.

Nonetheless, what I really think is important today is to mark the fact that most workers in this province want to retire early; they don't want to work until they drop. But the problem is that most workers would prefer to see that retirement in dignity with a pension so that they don't have to live in poverty. In fact, 60% of Ontarians are not covered by workplace pension plans of any kind, and 83% of workers in the private sector who do have

pension plans have no inflation protection on those plans, so they do end up retiring into poverty.

The government created a task force recently on pensions. Unfortunately, they forgot to include in the mandate of this task force the very fact that most workers in Ontario are not even covered by pension plans. So the very task force they set up doesn't even deal with the most important issue, which is that most people don't have pensions. That's the biggest problem that the workers in Ontario face. Unfortunately, the McGuinty government disagrees.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the Minister of Health's announcement, I want to say that this is an omnibus bill, make no doubt about it. Here is the copy before printing. The Liberals in opposition used to be against omnibus bills because, as they used to say, these were attempts by the government to throw everything in the pot, everything that the minister or the government had made a promise about but had never gotten out the door in a timely fashion. That's exactly what's happening here.

Justice Cory released his recommendation on a new audit process in April 2005; here we are, in December 2006, only now seeing amendments to make the changes he proposed. The government itself indicated that there was going to be a new agency on health promotion and health protection in June 2004; here we are, in December 2006, only now seeing the legislation to create that.

This is a really bad way to deal with important policy issues, especially health issues, especially ones that are going to have a big impact on key stakeholders, patients and the public. The way this is being done is virtually going to guarantee that important health policy issues that many individuals and organizations spent a long time dealing with—including HPRAC, Justice Cory etc.—are going to get short shrift because we are up against a timeline. Everybody can see that and everybody can see that the time for debate and public hearings is going to be significantly reduced as a result of that timeline.

I want to highlight several concerns. Number one, with respect to the agency for health protection and promotion: David Naylor, in his final report, said that this agency was going to need an operating budget of at least \$45 million, over and above the base budgets from the public health labs, and a capital budget of \$35 million. The question is, is the government going to put that money on the table to ensure that this agency can be created?

Secondly, with respect to the public health laboratories, the task force also said that before any transfer to the agency, there had to be a very well-developed human resources plan that was agreed to by all parties and the immediate establishment of a transition team to aid in that planning. We need to see those things in operation now, because it is clear that the laboratories are going to transfer to the agencies.

I'm really concerned about the funding for public health units because the amendments in the bill transfer current responsibilities of the Ministry of the Environment around inspection of water plants and small water plants to the public health units without any transfer of funds or human resources to do that. We already know that the public health units wrote to this minister in October 2006 pointing out the many, many jobs that were not created in the public health units because of this government's cap on public health funding in 2006. Where are the resources going to come from to allow the public health units to deal with this new responsibility?

With respect to the regulation of psychotherapy that has been proposed, the minister knows, because he and many others have received many letters from people who are concerned about regulation of mental health services generally—I hope that the provisions in this bill will allow for that, because otherwise the public will not be protected and many people who receive counselling services in northern Ontario and remote areas will have that access denied.

Finally, with respect to the audit provisions that are in the bill, these have to respond to what Justice Cory recommended. The former MRC process was badly flawed; it led to tragic circumstances and consequences. Any new process must really ensure that there's a fair audit process in place with an appeal mechanism.

VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I'd like to recognize two wonderful individuals from Thorncliffe Park in my riding of Don Valley West: Thillai Sinnadurai and Lathina Sinnadurai, his grade 4 student who's very interested in politics. Welcome to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE DE 18 ANS)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1440 to 1445.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinteh, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McGuinty, Dalton	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Tory, John
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 61; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

SHEELA BASRUR

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to recognize Dr. Sheela Basrur.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

Sheela Basrur came to the service of the people of the province of Ontario at a time when service was very much needed. The circumstances for our new government were clear: We had come to office and Ontario's public health system was seen to be in need of a major revamping.

In our province, 44 of our people had perished in a circumstance which we can all call SARS, but for many

of us was subject to so much consumption of daily media and so much searching within all of that media for people in whom we could have confidence in trying times. For so many people, Sheela Basrur was the public face of SARS. She was that voice in difficult and desperate times who offered reassurance when, frankly, many of us had a difficult time finding reassurance.

1450

We were very much privileged to be able to ask Dr. Basrur to come and join the service of public health in the province of Ontario by assuming the joint responsibilities of chief medical officer of health and assistant deputy minister in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. In the two and a half years since, she's launched a review of 36 public health units and laid the groundwork for extensive examination of programs and services delivered by public health units. Sheela Basrur's leadership, fingerprints, valuable advice and direction are found in significant elements of the bill that I'm privileged to have stand in my name and that has been brought to this House today.

We were all struck, I think, by the irony of circumstance quite recently when Dr. Basrur indicated, in her penultimately powerful way, without any hesitation, to put in the public domain the most personal of circumstances. I know how many members have been touched, because I have been fortunate, if you will, to be their conduit. So many people have come and said to me, "I want to make sure that I reach out and let Dr. Basrur know just what a degree of respect we have for the dedication she's brought, for the professionalism she's brought." I know that all members of this House, and indeed all Ontarians, whether they've had the privilege, as we have, to have been touched by her so personally or whether they've only experienced her through television, wish her Godspeed—on the basis of all those Ontarians to this one very accomplished public servant who has done so much for all of our health—and best wishes as she seeks to dedicate herself, with the level of dedication that she has and that few of us can muster, to the subject at hand, which is her own health. Accordingly, I'm privileged to offer on behalf and alongside all members our very, very best wishes, our love and our gratitude.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I join my colleague the Minister of Health in thanking Dr. Sheela Basrur for her leadership and commitment to health promotion and public health. In fact, she helped shape the very foundation of our ministry's work. Despite being perhaps one of the busiest people in the public service, Sheela always made time to listen, to teach, to share her ideas and advice, and to demonstrate a profound commitment and passion for creating a province in which everyone can be healthier.

Dr. Basrur has a deep understanding of the complex issues related to the social and economic determinants of health and has helped others understand the impact that these have on the health of Ontarians and the need to work collaboratively to improve the health of the population.

Let me just talk about two signature items.

Smoke-free Ontario: Dr. Basrur was instrumental in the development of the government's tobacco control strategy. She chaired the community action working group since its inception last year and guided the development of the SFO strategy in concert with all of Ontario's major health partners. She also worked with public health units across Ontario, helping them to understand the impact of this legislation.

Healthy eating and active living: Her report in 2004 entitled *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* sounded the alarms about the serious issues related to obesity and the lack of physical activity. In the report, Dr. Basrur set out a plan to promote healthy weights in Ontario, and the result was the healthy eating and active living action plan, the provincial government's response and the first plan to integrate the two key risk factors for obesity and chronic disease: poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

She cared very much about our First Nations and led the development of a protocol with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and represented the province at the signing ceremony in Thunder Bay.

Sheela has a rare combination of skills and characteristics that make her a charismatic and dynamic leader and a compassionate human being. We've been extremely fortunate to have worked with her and learned from her. We sincerely appreciate the humanity and compassion she has brought to her post and to everything she's been involved with. We wish her Godspeed with her next challenge and thank her for her dedication to the people of the province of Ontario. Thank you, Sheela.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): It is a pleasure and an honour to pay tribute today to Dr. Sheela Basrur on behalf of my leader, John Tory, and my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus.

I first had the privilege of meeting Dr. Basrur when I was Minister of Health. Of course, she was serving as the medical officer of health for the city of Toronto. I soon learned that she was one of the most sincere, hard-working, energetic and dedicated health professionals I had ever met. In fact, she truly was dedicated to the cause of health promotion and keeping individuals as healthy as they possibly could be. She was also very committed to promoting women's and children's services. I was pleased to be involved with her when we did our tobacco strategy and also when we introduced heart health.

One other thing that always impressed me, and I know my staff used to talk about this as well, is that when Sheela decided to undertake a task and focus on an activity, she was able to motivate and inspire the people around her—in fact, the people in the entire community—to work with her. She was able to recruit and retain many well-qualified and talented health professionals, who helped her to achieve the goal of keeping individuals as healthy as they possibly could be.

She has many achievements, but certainly I think one of her greatest achievements occurred during our time of office, and that was her strong performance in what were then uncharted waters during the SARS outbreak. This brought her to the attention not only of people in

Toronto, Ontario, and across Canada, but to people in the world. She certainly earned the respect and admiration of people far and wide for the very extraordinary leadership she exhibited. She was always that calm, reassuring voice of reason who provided easily understandable information to a very nervous population.

I was pleased—I think we were all pleased—that shortly after, she was appointed by the McGuinty government to become the chief medical officer of health for the province, where she leaves to this day a very strong legacy.

She can be very, very proud of her work on the anti-smoking strategy—certainly it is one that is most unique to North America—her efforts to combat obesity, and the focus that she brought to fighting the challenges of air pollution and the need to make sure that we in this province were prepared for any future flu epidemic.

I could go on and on, and some of her accomplishments have already been spoken to. But I decided to seek out some comments from those people with whom she worked most closely: her fellow medical officers of health. Dr. Robin Williams was kind enough to send some of those comments to me. Although they acknowledge that they were still reeling from your announcement, they were delighted to share, in some way, in paying tribute to you, Sheela. This is what they said:

She was “a mentor and role model to young women entering the field of public health in demonstrating that strong leadership can come in unexpected packages, and that as a woman it is possible to command a great deal of respect and get the job done in an exemplary way through compassion, listening, decisiveness and competence.” She was able to teach others, and was always willing to share “her knowledge and experience.”

Another said, “Her leadership has inspired the trust of” Ontarians “as well as the trust of her colleagues” in knowing she will always safeguard the public's health.

Another said, “Her ability to deal with us, a fractious lot of medical officers, in a steady and often gently humorous way, while building consensus, commitment and passion for a vision of public health in Ontario has always been exemplary.”

And yet another: She has a “sharp intellect—cool under fire and an extremely gifted communicator.”

And yet one more: She is “able to make and take decisive actions, in the most difficult of situations, with the wisest of judgment—the latest public example being her approach in these past few weeks to the challenges of her personal health, while making provision for the best interests of the health of the public.”

1500

Yes, Sheela, you have truly earned the respect not only of your own colleagues the medical officers of health and of us in this House, but I can truly say that anybody I have talked to in recent weeks has spoken of you in a manner that I've never heard before. You are a pioneer in public health. You are a truly remarkable and courageous person, daughter and mother. You have exhibited grace in times of tremendous pressure.

I want you to know, and I know I speak for many Ontarians, that you will be front and centre in our hearts over this period of treatment and recovery. We wish you well in your fight against cancer. Our support, our prayers and our love go with you and your daughter, Simone, and your parents.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): As the third speaker today, I suspected that by the time it was my turn to speak, the many and varied accomplishments of Dr. Basrur would have already been listed and read into the public record, and indeed that has been done, so there is nothing more I could add to make those accomplishments more meaningful than they have been publicly today. Instead, I'd like to offer these two thoughts to Dr. Basrur, and I trust, Sheela, that you'll accept them in the spirit in which they are given.

First, my mom has beaten cancer, not once but twice. The first time she had a bout with cancer, I was only eight years old. I don't have much recollection of that first fight. I do remember much more clearly five years later when she was given a clear bill of health after having been monitored for those five years.

The second time she fought cancer I remember much more clearly, because it only happened three years ago. On December 27, my brothers and I and our families were at home for Christmas when my mom received the results of her biopsy. She had a very aggressive form of breast cancer, and there was nothing that struck fear into all of us more than hearing that message.

My mother, who was much more courageous than all of us, said very clearly, "I have much to live for, and I intend to do just that." She had a mastectomy and three years later is still being monitored, but things are good. I share that story with you because I have learned to always have hope, and as you face this current challenge, I trust that you will have hope too.

The second thing I want to say is that I'm not a betting person. My one and only experience with a casino in Ontario occurred 10 years ago at the then interim casino in Windsor, where I parted company with \$40 in about 10 minutes. Having said that, if I were a betting person, my money would be on you. There is no one I know who, given your otherwise good health and very positive attitude, could give cancer a run for the money in the way that I know you are going to. I know that with the support of your parents, who are here today, and your daughter, you will face this newest challenge with the same kind of focused, disciplined and unwavering commitment that you have faced so many other challenges, not the least of which was the SARS crisis.

In conclusion, I want to thank you on behalf of the Ontario NDP, I want to thank you personally for the enormous contribution you have made to public health in the province of Ontario, and I look forward to your continuing to make an enormous contribution to the public in Ontario when your personal health allows you to best do so. Godspeed, and all of our thoughts are with you.

Applause.

VISITORS

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce two individuals who work for a company that resides in my riding: Don Rippert, the chief technology officer, who is visiting us from the United States; and Darren Nippard, the head of government services, Canada, for Accenture, a very dynamic technology company that does business with all levels of government.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. It seems that the litany of waste and abuse of taxpayers' money runs wild through every nook and cranny of the Dalton McGuinty government. Whether it's millions on hotel rooms for the ministries of education and health, \$163 million at Hydro One with no receipts or \$60,000 SUVs at the children's aid societies, the government seemingly can't help itself when it comes to treating the taxpayers and their money with contempt.

The Auditor General confirmed that the government itself is a big part of the problem, as reported today in the Toronto Sun. In a few short cabinet meetings at the very end of the year, you spent hundreds of millions of dollars without proper controls, exactly the same thing as was found at Hydro One: spending money without proper controls.

When are you going to stop treating the taxpayers' money like it is play money and start insisting that all of the rules be followed all of the time in all circumstances, without exception?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To state the obvious, I take issue with the leader of the official opposition's characterization of past events and our management of the public's money. I think what he really objects to is the fact that, yes, we did invest significant dollars year-end. We put \$670 million into a subway expansion; he objects to that. We put \$65 million into the Mississauga transit system; he objects to that. And we put \$95 million into the Brampton transit system; he objects to that.

We had a choice with respect to whether we should be using \$400 million at year-end to invest in roads and bridges, and to help our municipal partners manage those heavy challenges. We could have paid down the debt, I guess, or reduced the deficit further. But we thought we owed it to our municipal partners to help them out. The leader of the official opposition objects to that. What he's really saying today is that it's not so much the process he objects to; it's the fact that we continue to make the kinds of investments the people of Ontario need.

Mr. Tory: Actually, the Premier has it wrong. What I object to is the complete contempt you show for the rules

that govern the expenditure and safekeeping of the taxpayers' money. That is what I object to, and that is what a lot of other taxpayers object to. You treat this money like you can do anything you want with it, and people object profoundly to that. You treat it like you're on some kind of all-expenses-paid shopping spree. You just go around and grab anything you want—forget the rules.

Here is what the Auditor General had to say: "In many cases," referring to this year-end spending, "normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated...." That's what he said. The McGuinty government is just as guilty, in those words, of skirting the rules as were the people at Hydro One who spent without proper controls.

You made a solemn commitment to fix things up, change the rules and show some respect. Are you just going to continue with these spending sprees and ignore the rules like you did in handing out the \$3 million, or are you going to do something to address your own recklessness?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, Speaker, as I'm sure you would surmise, I cannot agree with my friend opposite when he says that investing \$670 million in subway expansion is part of some irresponsible spending spree.

Earlier, I listed some of the things we invested in, but there are many more. We chose to invest in the future of our farmers with a \$125-million payment to grain, oilseed and horticulture farmers. Now, he may characterize that as part of a spending spree; we see it as providing essential support to our farmers.

We chose to invest in cultural centres; the party opposite voted against that. That's \$49 million to support the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Ballet School, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Canadian Opera Company and the Gardiner ceramic museum. Again, the leader of the official opposition may characterize that kind of investment as part of an irresponsible spending spree, but we see it as a good investment made on behalf of and for the people of Ontario.

1510

Mr. Tory: The fact is that every single one of those projects and initiatives could have been undertaken and the rules followed at the same time. You don't have to do those things and break the rules.

March 9 cabinet meeting, \$432 million: That's \$2.4 million a minute. March 23 cabinet meeting, \$640 million: \$3.5 million a minute. March 30 cabinet meeting, \$205 million: \$1.4 million a minute. According to the auditor—not me—no accountability, not following the rules, relaxing or eliminating the controls on taxpayers' money.

The auditor is critical of this kind of recklessness. Taxpayers are worried that you're going to embark on another wild spending spree to try and buy the next election. Will you commit here and now to take the auditor's words to heart and to follow the rules and the controls without exception every single time you're going to spend one dollar of taxpayers' money? Will you commit to doing that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just say that we will always be respectful of the process. But where my friend and I part company is in terms of the end that we have in mind. He categorizes investment in public transit, investment in the future of our farmers, investment in our cultural centres, investment in our public libraries, investment in research and innovation as being part of some kind of an irresponsible spending spree. We see things differently. We will always be respectful of the process. At the same time, we are equally determined to make the kinds of investments that we've made in the past, the kinds of investments that are meaningful to the people of Ontario, that enhance their prosperity and improve their quality of life, and we will not shrink away from fulfilling that responsibility.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question, the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Premier. The auditor points out as well that none of the money has actually been spent. He says that right in his own report.

In any event, the Auditor General's report, if you keep going through the pages, is a nightmare before Christmas for Ontario taxpayers. Every turn of the page has another horror story on their hard-earned dollars getting misused and abused.

Now we've seen a real problem, not confined to any one place, with people dining out on the taxpayers: hydro employees, school board employees, children's aid employees, money spent on fancy meals—\$100 per person, \$130 per person of taxpayers' money, money that should be going to classrooms and vulnerable kids. You have guidelines for government employees: \$40 a day total for meals, no more than \$20 a day on any one meal. The Minister of Education says she sent a note out in her area. Have you bothered to send a note out or issue any directive at all to the broader public sector saying there are guidelines on this, they must be adhered to and we are not going to have people dining out on these kinds of monies across the public sector, money that's meant for education and kids? Have you done that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's interesting to note that virtually all of the references to misspending just made by the leader of the Conservative Party were the kinds of events that were discovered as a result of us providing new authorities to the Provincial Auditor. Had we not done so, he never would have discovered those kinds of things.

We are proud of the fact that, as a government, we believe in true transparency and accountability; proud of the fact that we've extended the ambit of authority for the Provincial Auditor; proud of the fact that he has seized those new opportunities and is now looking at our school boards, our colleges, our universities, our hospitals, OPG, Hydro One and children's aid societies; proud of the fact that he's making specific recommendations to those bodies after he looks into them. Also, I've taken the opportunity—and the leader of the official opposition will know this—to tell the people of Ontario that there's a new standard, a new and higher standard in place.

There's more transparency, there's more accountability, there's more responsibility, and we all have to act responsibly when it comes to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I guess it's the same transparency we saw with Mr. Parkinson. The fact is, you can make all of the statements that you want, but if you don't do anything about it and say to people, "We're going to enforce new rules and impose new rules," it doesn't matter.

Another potential leakage in this nightmare of horrors before Christmas is the leakage of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that comes from the auditor's findings. There are 7,000 cases of possible improper use of OHIP cards in a 10-month backlog. The auditor says 40% of those cards historically have been found to be ineligible. That's 2,800 cards. If you assume each of those 2,800 cards spent \$2,800 on health care, which is a commonly used number, and the backlog gets bigger and bigger, that's \$8 million of taxpayers' money for health down the drain. Your government's response to the Auditor General in the report is to say that you "will review business processes." Why can't you move quickly? Why won't you move quickly to get the resources in place even temporarily to get rid of these cheaters and stop this gross misuse of the taxpayers' money? Why won't you do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member made up a lot of numbers there, had a lot of hypotheses, but at the heart of it, we understand that the auditor has given us good advice with respect to the circumstances related to OHIP cards. The honourable member, for the purposes of a question, likes to pretend that he doesn't know about the improvement that has been made, even since the report began in December 2005.

Indeed, today's bill, the health system improvement bill, contains even further legislative capacity on the part of the government to ensure that Ontarians are keeping up to date with all of their information on the card; that is, if they move, that they fulfill their obligation to apprise officials and to get new cards as required.

We take everything that the Auditor General says seriously. We're working diligently in the ministry to improve on circumstances, and, indeed, last week in the House I indicated the level of improvement that has already occurred. But we're restless and relentless to drive further change and improvement forward and, accordingly, we will.

Mr. Tory: It's certainly amusing to hear from the minister of made-up numbers about made-up numbers on the part of other people.

Another example from the Nightmare Book Before Christmas is over at OPG, and my question, of course, is to the Premier. They approved \$498,000—properly—on renovations to the corporate offices, and then that renovation ballooned to \$1.8 million without any competition or documentation at all. The auditor identified in the very same report in a different chapter literally hundreds of

publicly owned buildings that were either in poor condition or defective condition, but somehow they find \$2 million, more than half of it unauthorized, over at OPG to renovate the corporate offices.

Can the Premier tell us what the \$2 million was for and if he has told these corporations, "Follow the rules. If you don't follow the rules, there are going to be consequences, including people losing their jobs, and when it's these kinds of things, do the buildings that need to be done first, that most need it, not just some \$2-million project to renovate anything that comes to anybody's mind"? Have you done that?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Yes, we have. In fact, I spoke at length with the chair of OPG. I'd remind the Leader of the Opposition that the auditor provided a number of recommendations. I have had that conversation with the chair of the board there and the chair at Hydro One, and they are taking appropriate action.

I would remind the member opposite of some of their multi-million-dollar projects. There was the \$4.6 million in untendered contracts to Michael Gourley, \$1.074 million in untendered contracts to Paul Rhodes, and the list goes on and on. There was the booth at the Air Canada Centre that some of your colleagues had the opportunity to be part of.

This government shone the light on the challenge. This government is addressing the challenge. This government will respond to all of the auditor's recommendations, because the auditor is right: We have to do it better. We will ensure that happens.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This morning hydro consumers found out they paid for Tom Parkinson's \$96,000 BMW 645ci. That's the latest example of unchecked greed at Hydro One.

You promise things will be different, but what you're trying to hide is the fact that under the McGuinty government hydro salaries have exploded. Today in Ontario, under the McGuinty government, 15 hydro executives receive more financial compensation than the president of Hydro-Québec, a much bigger hydro utility.

My question is this: Can the Premier tell us why Ontario under the McGuinty government has so many high-priced hydro executives gorging at the public trough?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): The member opposite only has that information because we provided it to the public, and that is the first step in addressing what's going on at Hydro One and OPG. We acknowledge the challenges that are here today. We acknowledge that they have been there for many years. Unlike past governments, this government will respond

in a timely and responsible fashion to ensure that the ratepayers of Ontario get value for money.

1520

We brought in the auditor. We're glad he went in. We will respond to all of the recommendations. And I would remind the member opposite—I know he has a history of opening and stripping collective agreements—that a lot of these salaries and benefits are based on collective agreements, and I would urge the member to think long and hard about that. You learned what happens when you don't do that in an appropriate fashion.

It's time to address the problems. We are doing it in a timely and responsible fashion. We accept the auditor's recommendations.

Mr. Hampton: I think people across Ontario want to know what union Tom Parkinson belongs to. I suspect it's the Liberal union.

We heard lots of bluster. Here is the reality. Dalton McGuinty has created a hydro hydra, a five-headed electricity bureaucracy that's devouring working families' money every day. Dalton McGuinty has a hydro bureaucracy for setting hydro rates, a bureaucracy for transmission, a bureaucracy that writes RFPs, a bureaucracy for some of the supply, a bureaucracy that regulates a market that doesn't exist and a bureaucracy for a conservation plan that doesn't exist. At the top of every one of these hydro bureaucracies, hydro fat cats rake in big bucks.

Premier, with so many people struggling to pay their hydro bills, how does the McGuinty government justify the explosion of bloated salaries across the hydro-electricity bureaucracies that you have created?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I suppose the member doesn't want to regulate an electricity sector. Is that what he's saying? I suppose the member doesn't want to have a planning authority. Is that what he's saying? I suppose the member doesn't want to deal with the real problems that are out there, and it's clear he doesn't want to acknowledge that the challenges we're faced with today have been faced at Ontario Hydro for many years.

For instance, his government spent \$73 million purchasing an electrical utility in Peru. Now, would I blame the member opposite personally for that? No. But let me tell you, what this government is doing differently from the government he was part of is that we're dealing with it. We put the auditor onto it, we're going to fix it, we're going to give ratepayers an assurance that they can expect better in the future and we're moving in that direction today.

Mr. Hampton: I guess the McGuinty government's giving Tom Parkinson \$1.6 million and then a further \$3 million is what the McGuinty government calls fixing things.

If we look east, to the province of Quebec, we see a unified hydroelectricity system, supply is plentiful, rates are reasonable and executive compensation is reasonable. There is only one president of Hydro-Québec and he gets paid less than \$500,000.

If we look to the west, a unified hydro system: Manitoba Hydro. Executive pay is reasonable: only one executive, who gets paid \$339,000.

In Ontario, Dalton McGuinty has created a multi-headed hydro monster where rates are skyrocketing, supply is spotty and fat-cat executives are at the top of everything, raking in the money.

Premier, people are losing their jobs because they can't pay the hydro bill. How do you justify paying so many hydro executives multi-million dollars in pay?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government is going to respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to all the recommendations of the auditor.

If the member wants to suggest that our system is as ideal as Quebec's or Manitoba's, it's not. We don't have the geography. He may not be aware of it, but they're net exporters and have lots of power to export. We have a much more complex situation.

It's interesting, though. Again, hydro has a long history of money being spent in ways that are a little bit questionable, and that's why we brought the auditor in. Your government spent \$1.3 million on a survey designed to understand the whole person. And do you know what they concluded, from that survey they spent \$1.3 million on, about electricity? It's important to be in love and have a love relationship that lasts. Those are the kinds of expenditures that have gone on historically. There are enormous challenges. The member doesn't have an answer for them. All he has is bluster. This government is responding to the auditor. This government is bringing order to this—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier. You say you're considering salary caps for your horde of hydro executives, but your word doesn't match your actions. Take the chair of the Ontario Energy Board. In 2002, before you became the government, he was paid \$122,000. In 2003, he gets a pay increase to \$191,000. In 2004, the McGuinty government raises his pay to \$498,000. In 2005, the McGuinty government raises this executive's pay to \$691,000. So that's a \$569,000 pay increase in three years.

Premier, how can you tell the people of Ontario that you are capping hydro executive salaries when it's the McGuinty government that's been raising them through the roof?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, the individual he has referenced is not an executive at either OPG or Hydro One. He's the head regulator of the Ontario Energy Board. It used to be Floyd Laughren. You remember him. We replaced him with somebody who had been the head of the Ontario Securities Commission and a number of other regulatory functions, and contracts were signed at the time of his hiring.

It is important that we respond to the auditor. It is important that we have these discussions. It's important that we handle them in an appropriate fashion. This gov-

ernment is committed to doing that. This government is committed to working with the entire sector. Most of all, this government is committed to ensuring that there is an adequate and reliable supply of electricity at affordable rates for ratepayers. We're delivering that and we're going to continue to deliver that.

Mr. Hampton: I just want to provide a few more examples. Thierry Vandal runs Hydro-Québec, a very complex transmission and generation hydro company with \$57 billion in assets. In 2005, he was paid \$470,000. In Ontario, under the McGuinty government, 15 hydro executives all get paid more than that. Tom Parkinson pocketed his \$1.6 million and \$3 million on the way out the door. Howard Wetston, at the Ontario Energy Board, gets his \$691,000. The Premier's former Bay Street bagman, who's now head of the Ontario Power Authority, gets \$637,000. The Independent Electricity System Operator's Dave Goulding, \$720,000, and OPG's Mr. Hankinson is in line to get \$1.6 million.

Premier, how can you justify these kinds of salaries when you tell people that you're capping the salaries?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The key issue is to ensure that we have an adequate, reliable supply of electricity. We're dealing with all of the challenges that have been discussed and, by the way, haven't been dealt with in the past. I could go through executive compensation at Ontario Hydro from 1990 to 1995. I could reference expense records. I could reference the \$34-billion debt that came about at that point. I could reference the \$10 million to \$12 million spent acquiring a Costa Rican rainforest. The point is that we have to move forward. We brought in freedom of information, we brought in the Auditor General, and we're going to bring in change to make those utilities more accountable to the public and ensure that we continue to have an adequate, reliable and affordable supply of electricity in this province, something, sir, that you never did.

Mr. Hampton: I think the people of Ontario understand what the truth is: The McGuinty government has been welcoming hydro executive fat cats with open arms. They also understand that the McGuinty government has been giving hydro consumers the back of the hand. Low-income people are struggling to pay the hydro bill. Literally thousands of workers have lost their jobs because their paper mill or their factory can't afford to pay the hydro bill. Meanwhile, the McGuinty government doles out millions of dollars to dozens of hydroelectricity executive fat cats whom you've appointed and put in their position. Now the McGuinty government expects people to believe this latest promise.

Premier, why should people believe your promise to cap hydro executive salaries, when you're the one who has been raising them through the roof and you have such a spotty record of keeping promises you've already made?

1530

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's this government that brought the auditor in; it's this government that shone the light on OPG and Hydro One; it's this government that brought in

salary disclosure; and it's this government that has finally addressed the critical supply shortage of electricity we have had. There are many more challenges, including ensuring that OPG and Hydro One remain accountable to the people of Ontario. We're doing that. We are acting on the auditor's recommendations, and we will be moving forward with more change in the coming weeks and months to ensure that those ratepayers can have confidence in their public utilities. And we're going to continue, sir, to ensure that there's an adequate, reliable supply of electricity into the future.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Premier, several days have passed now and we're still not clear, after all the discussion, on the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Tom Parkinson from his position as CEO of Hydro One.

We all know that this came after revelation after revelation of mismanagement of the taxpayers' money. What the people who are e-mailing me—more e-mail than I've received on anything else since I've been here—don't understand is this: The board said they didn't want him to go and that they accepted his resignation reluctantly. They wonder, the people who are writing, why he then received a \$3-million payoff when he left of his own volition. The Minister of Energy says this was the cheapest option. I would suggest and would ask the Premier why he didn't consider the cheaper option, which is to give him one of those thank-you cards that they're using over at OPG now, hand him that and wish him well? Why didn't you pursue that as the cheapest option if, in fact, he left of his own volition and he quit? Why didn't you do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: As I've indicated in the past, the advice the government had was that this was in fact the least expensive way of resolving the set of circumstances we found ourselves in. The advice was clear and unequivocal, and we accepted that advice, just as we accept and will be moving on all of the Auditor General's recommendations. That's why we brought in the provisions that we did, to allow the Auditor General to look at these things. In the longer course of events, given the historic situations that are still out there in terms of legal issues, we felt that this was the least expensive way of dealing with the situation and feel it was also the most responsible.

Mr. Tory: It's really quite simple. I think the taxpayers might have even accepted one of those leather coats plus the thank-you card if the fellow quit and was in need of something to thank him for his service. When you quit your job—especially when you quit under a cloud—you don't get a multi-million-dollar, multi-year package. Mr. Parkinson's choice apparently was to leave this job. The board said they were reluctant to see him go; they wanted to see him stay. You say the least expensive option, leaving aside entirely any matter of principle involved, is that he gets \$3 million for that. Will the

Premier please tell us under what circumstances, what possible circumstances, the \$3-million, multi-year payout could be justified if Mr. Parkinson quit on his own, under circumstances that are even more lavish than the retirement gifts we heard about at OPG that they now say are unacceptable? Why is this acceptable? Why is this the cheapest option? Why is it happening at all if he quit?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Again, the board and the government have acted in a way that we believe will minimize the cost to ratepayers associated with the situation. The member opposite knows full well that these are complex issues. In fact, he said on December 6, "It's always unfortunate when you have to pay out a big severance package, but those are a part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you can't ignore." You simply can't ignore that. I concur entirely with what he said. You have to take it in the context of all the circumstances surrounding the situation. That being said, I think the Leader of the Opposition and all members of this House are concerned about what was found. We are concerned. We intend to respond in a positive way to the auditor's report, and we intend to deal with OPG and Hydro One, and the broader public sector, in a way that not only previous governments did not want to deal with it but that previous governments didn't even want to speak about. We want to talk about it, we're going to deal with it, and we look forward to the ongoing discussions we're going to have around these issues.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Toronto businesses continue to get squeezed by your inequitable property tax regime and your government does nothing about it. Toronto's commercial property taxpayers are paying a rate that is 44% higher than the lowest urban rate in the GTA region and 30% higher than the GTA average. Toronto's business taxpayers do not receive a higher level of service than those outside the city, nor do Toronto schools benefit from businesses paying a higher rate of education taxes. Minister, this is causing serious problems for Toronto's small business owners. What are you going to do about it, and when are you going to do it?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): This is a great day for democracy, when my friend the NDP member from Parkdale–High Park starts to argue for lower taxes. I'm not sure it's the subway; I felt the room shake a little bit.

Let me tell her that we have been working particularly with small business to lower both the paper and regulatory burden and the tax burden. So we negotiated an historic agreement with the federal government to eliminate the entire process of filing and paying the provincial corporate tax, and soon I will have more to say to her on that.

On the subject of business education taxes, I simply say to her that it is one of the issues that we are putting

before a special committee task force of the province and municipalities right across Ontario.

Ms. DiNovo: The members of TABIA are here, and they have been waiting for 10 years. They met with you last June. Experts say this business tax regime is a significant contributor to the loss of business activity and employment in the city of Toronto to the 905 regions. Over the last 15 years, the 905 regions have gained 700,000 jobs while Toronto has lost 100,000. The business leaders here today want to know that their government has a plan. They don't want another commission or committee or promises. They want action. This is causing serious problems. People are losing their businesses. I ask you again, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I just point out to my friend that Toronto business property owners benefited from some \$262 million a year due to cuts in business education taxes. I could be here for the rest of the afternoon listing what we have invested in city of Toronto over the past three years: hundreds of millions of dollars in transit, a brand new City of Toronto Act that recognizes the unique circumstances of the city of Toronto, but I simply say to her, and to those in the gallery, that the business education taxes of the city of Toronto are one of the things that we are going to be looking at as we examine initiatives moving forward toward a budget in 2007.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The McGuinty government is committed to ensuring that the youth of this province are given the opportunities they need to succeed in life. That's why, after so many years of cuts and neglect by previous governments, we're making historic investments: the \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan. We're giving people access to the education training they need to succeed, and in an economy where over 70% of all new jobs require post-secondary education, parents feel that for success, their sons or daughters need to go to university or college. Yet Ontario's rich post-secondary options also include an extensive college system with an enhanced skills training network. That's why I was pleased to hear you announce yesterday the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. It's been incredibly successful in attracting many of Ontario's young people. I saw 600 students participating in my own riding of Huron–Bruce last year.

But, Minister, my question is, for the benefit of those who aren't familiar with OYAP, can you tell us how OYAP prepares students for a career in the skilled trades and how it differs from a regular co-operative education program?

1540

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): It is indeed a very important and good question. OYAP is the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. It gives students the opportunity to not only earn high school credits but, at the same time, start

their apprenticeship while they're in high school. We know how important the skilled trades are. In fact, the member for Huron–Bruce often speaks about the need to ensure more skilled trades, not only for the traditional businesses in her riding but for the new and emerging businesses in the power and green power areas.

She mentioned that her riding has benefited from over 600 placements in the past year. This year we expect even more in Huron–Bruce, upwards of 650, and across the province, we expect 26,500 students will have that opportunity. That's more than twice as many as just three years ago. The program is working. The McGuinty government is proud to support it.

Mrs. Mitchell: It's very encouraging to know that every Ontarian has the opportunity to get the training they need to qualify for higher-paying jobs so that they can obtain a better quality of life while becoming valuable contributors to our economy.

This leads to my next question: With all that we are doing to prepare Ontarians for the workforce by way of job training, what do these students and apprentices have to look forward to after receiving the skills they need? What job prospects and opportunities are there for these hard-working and well-trained Ontarians?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: A question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I'm very happy to respond to the second question, related to the kinds of jobs we can expect to see in Ontario in the future and those that we're moving to now.

Like my colleague in training, colleges and universities, we have never had stronger links with colleges, universities and training centres and industry than we have today. A number of examples show us the kinds of jobs these people can be prepared to take: Sutherland, new opportunities in Windsor of 1,000 value-added jobs; Kellogg's new plant, its first plant in 20 years, being built now in Belleville with 100 new jobs just to start; Toyota Boshoku, as well, a new plant opening, with assistance, being close to that Toyota plant, that new greenfield site.

We are looking, through the auto sector alone, at 7,000 new jobs coming to Ontario. We're proud to be partnering not just with post-secondary institutions but, in fact, with industry to create real opportunity for Ontarians.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: Since the leaked Auditor General's report on the misuse of funds by children's aid societies, I've been asking the minister what has been done. I have written a letter to the minister, I've submitted an order paper question and I've asked several questions in this House. No action, no answers, no accountability from the minister in this House, just an accountability office slated for January. Yet on Monday, the minister felt compelled to write a

letter to the editor of the Lindsay Daily Post defending her rampant misspending at CASs while responding to my colleague Laurie Scott's monthly column.

Why is the minister spending her time responding to columns in local community papers rather than taking responsibility and responding to the people she is supposed to represent in this Legislature regarding her department's utter failure at CASs?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to once again speak about what we are doing here. I should also tell the member for Nepean–Carleton that she can expect to receive my response to her letter within a day or two. In fact, I have seen it and I expect to be signing it today. I improved and expanded upon the response, so I think she should be satisfied that she'll be getting a comprehensive response.

With regard to responding to the ill-advised piece from her colleague in the Lindsay paper, I think it is fair and reasonable for the people of Ontario to get the facts of this situation, not some political spin on the situation.

Ms. MacLeod: It's funny that she thinks it's fine to do a four-day turnaround time for community papers, but when legislators in this place have a question, she decides it's a two-week turnaround for them. What a lack of respect. Instead of defending rampant misspending at children's aid societies in local community papers, the minister should be worried that Lindsay has no Best Start spaces—absolutely zero.

But zero Best Start spaces in Lindsay aren't the only inaction by this minister. Let's look at her record of inaction in the last two weeks in this House. On November 30, the day the CBC story broke about CAS misspending, I asked her a question: What had been done? No response. On December 1, I sent her a letter asking what had been done. No response. On December 4, December 5 and December 6, John Tory and I questioned her on what had been done. No response. On December 7, the minister tried to sneak away and hide from the question, but it was asked, and guess what? No response.

What has been done, who has been fired and when will this minister respect Ontarians and take responsibility in this Legislature for her own—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children and Youth Services can respond.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In spite of the theatrics, I am happy to respond again, as I have over several days since the report's official release. We are creating a new accountability office that will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislative requirements for the care and protection of children and ensure that corrective action is taken as needed; assess and report on agency performance; and provide my ministry's staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement in the CASs.

We are requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards, as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service, for their own employees and pro-

grams in such areas as the procurement of goods and services; travel, meal and other expenses; hospitality; and the management of fleet vehicles. We're conducting an independent assessment of the fleet requirements of children's aid societies so that, where less expensive alternatives exist, CASs will be directed to relinquish vehicles as quickly and economically as possible, with savings redirected into service for children and youth. We are acting.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Premier, Bruce Power has applied to the National Energy Board to export 2,000 megawatts of nuclear-generated electricity to the United States. Instead of reserving limited capacity on high-voltage lines out of the Bruce area for clean, green wind energy, your government has capped wind energy development so that Bruce nuclear can export power to the United States. Will you stop Bruce Power from exporting even one megawatt of nuclear-generated power until you lift the cap off green power development in the Bruce area?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): No. The fact is that that power is exported at off-peak times when the wind power that you've been talking about—which, by the way, isn't up and running yet. So the answer is no. This has been going on for many years. The power is exported at off-peak times. It's baseload power. It's power that we would pay for otherwise—a tremendous cost to do that. It's not that that's causing the challenges with getting the power out of new opportunities in the Bruce; it's the lack of transmission. I know that that member opposite and his party will support us as we move forward to deal with the transmission issue. There is absolutely no correlation between the two issues. In fact, to not export the power would not be in the interest of ratepayers; it would hamper the development of new renewable power. So the answer to the member is no.

Mr. Tabuns: I find it a passing strange answer, but I'll continue on. Dalton McGuinty said that the lights would go out unless this province threw \$40 billion at dirty, unreliable and expensive nuclear power. Now, a few months later, Bruce nuclear is applying to export up to one third of its potential generation, some 2,000 megawatts, thanks to your sweetheart deal that sees Ontario ratepayers and taxpayers subsidize Bruce Power's fuel costs, nuclear waste disposal costs and decommissioning costs. Why are you letting Bruce Power export Ontario taxpayer- and ratepayer-subsidized nuclear power to the United States?

1550

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I will try to explain to the member that we are net importers of power in Ontario at the moment. Perhaps had your government not cancelled the Conawapa project, perhaps had you built at least one new energy installation in five years, we wouldn't be in this.

So if the member is suggesting that a province that imports power at peak times in summer and winter shouldn't be exporting at off-peak times, that we should cut ourselves off, that's a recipe for blackouts and economic disaster. I say to the member, I'd think that through long and carefully if I were you, because you've just advocated essentially shutting off major power supply that we need at peak time both in summer and winter. By the way, the power we sell at off-peak time helps maintain the operations and ensure not only that we can import power when we need to, but also helps to ensure that prices continue to remain as competitive as they are.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Could I ask for unanimous consent to extend question period to its full hour?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent to extend question period past 4 o'clock for a full hour? Agreed. Next question.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a question today for the Minister of Transportation. As we approach the one-year anniversary of high-occupancy vehicle lanes in Ontario, my constituents were asking if they've really made a difference. As you know, there are plenty of folks, myself included, who drive in and out of Toronto from Oakville through Mississauga almost every day. Could you tell the members of this Legislature, and for the benefit of my own constituents, how this initiative has really dealt with the challenges around traffic congestion in the greater Toronto area?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'd like to thank the member from Oakville for his question and also for his constant encouragement around this particular issue, as we move from one part of the QEW through to the end at the border.

We are the first government in history to put in an HOV lane. We've spent \$100 million—404, 403. It's making a difference. One of the reasons we can actually identify it is making a difference, because we put in right at the beginning, where people started to use it, and how they have used it incrementally—we now have information that indicates that at peak time we have double the capacity.

It's also changing congestion in terms of people who are now using buses. More people are using buses because, of course, buses can use the HOV lanes. So it's a good example of how we're tackling gridlock and congestion, which is a priority in our government. It's another example of using an innovative way to use or add on to our existing highways. I'd be more than pleased to add additional information.

Mr. Flynn: Thanks to the minister for her response. The introduction of HOV lanes on the 403 and 404, by most accounts, has certainly contributed to easing some of the pressure on our roads. However, there's no denying that gridlock continues to be a challenge that is

faced throughout the greater Toronto area. I certainly know it is one that commuters in my riding face and know all about. I often hear stories about the hours spent travelling to and from work every day.

Minister, what else is this government doing to ease the pressure on Ontarians, to ensure that we're all able to spend much less time in our cars and much more time with our families?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Again I thank the member for the question. We have something called the Compass system across our highways. Currently across the 401, every five minutes you can have an update as to what the status of that highway is in terms of an incident, a collision or construction. We have now extended that to the QEW. So you can either go online beforehand or you can find out through the Compass signs as you're travelling.

We've invested \$400 million—the first time in many years—to help our local municipal roads. We've put a huge amount of money, \$1.3 billion, into public transit. Again, it's the first time in many years that we've made this kind of commitment in public transit—\$830 million alone for GO Transit—because we recognize that we need to value the public transit system as much as we value other forms of transportation.

We have also invested in the Greater Toronto Transit Authority. This is the first time in the history of this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please conclude your response.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: —that we have had an integrated approach to transportation planning that includes all forms of transportation, starting with GO Transit from Hamilton to Durham, enabling people to actually cross-border and to do it in a seamless fashion, using for the—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. You promised to shut down coal power, and you proceeded to break that promise. You promised that you would replace it by leading the way in wind power generation, and it appears you're breaking that one as well.

Minister, after luring developers with your promises and watching them make huge investments, you have now shut down wind power over a substantial portion of Ontario. In March, with your standard offer, everything was a go: "No transmission constraints—we need everything we can get." They go to work with Hydro One, they make deals with landowners, and now you're telling them that everything coming off Lake Huron, from Tobermory to Longwood, from Lambton to London—it's like Caledonia, it's a no-go zone. But it's a no-go zone for wind power.

Minister, why are you shutting down wind power in Bruce county, basically, off Lake Huron? Why are you—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): In Ontario, we've gone from last to first in Canada for wind power. We have brought on more than 450 megawatts up until now. There are another thousand scheduled to come online between now and the end of the year; they are under various stages of construction.

I welcome the member's question, because there is a transmission constraint in Bruce—no question. The projects that are already approved have line space; the Enbridge project is a good example of that. It will make standard offer more difficult in that particular part of the province, where there are a lot of opportunities. Based on your question, I know now that we can count on your support and the member from Grey county's support as we deal with the transmission constraint coming out of Bruce county, because you're right: It is one that needs to be dealt with. We're dealing with it, and we look forward to your support, because we want to get all of that wind, every last bit of it, out of Bruce county.

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, Minister, why could you not have dealt with them honestly in March when you told them that transmission is not an issue? "Come on, guys. Bring in your money and build. We'll take it." That's what you told them in March. As a matter of fact, 37 different connection impact assessments have been done, covering 397 megawatts. Some 61% of the wind power applications across this province are in this area, and you've told them no—the standard offer, the under 10 megawatts. You've told all of these people who have put their heart and soul, their hard-earned dollars and their investments into this province—you are saying no. Why couldn't you have been straight with them in March? Why are you now telling them, once they have invested millions? What kind of signal are you sending to everybody else in the world? Do you know what you're telling them? The only consistency of your energy policy is inconsistency. You continue to send mixed messages across this province and across this country. Minister, it is time to get a hold of yourselves and come out with a policy that people can depend on.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Let me say to the honourable member, first of all, that he is right that there are a large number of applications in Bruce. But they are all very small and don't represent a large percentage of the overall wind opportunity in Ontario. That's number one.

Number two, the transmission constraint coming out of Bruce county has been well known for some time. It has been the subject of the ISO's reports every six months. It has been well identified to investors and others alike.

Finally, in terms of the opportunities in Bruce county, there are a number of opportunities. Once we address the transmission constraint—and I note that the member for Grey county is vigorously supporting his colleague in dealing with that transmission constraint, as I'm sure the members in a number of other surrounding counties are as well. I'm delighted you're going to support us on that,

delighted you'll work with us on that, because I agree: We have to maximize the opportunities we have in Bruce county.

Carol Mitchell deserves enormous credit for all the work she has done in dealing with those particular—

The Acting Speaker: Next question.

1600

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Mr. Minister, last week I asked you about calling an immediate provincial investigation into the allegations of wrongdoing, or alleged wrongdoing, in the city of Vaughan. But I want to further point out that 28 sessional days ago, I stood in this House and presented a petition from the citizens of the city of Vaughan requesting a ministerial inquiry. In those 28 days, you have not responded. So I am asking you, on both those behalves—the question I asked last week which was not answered and the petition that has not been answered—when are you going to put your office in charge of this and call an investigation, as the citizens have requested?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's passing strange that this member asked me about an hour and a half ago whether or not I was ready to meet with the mayor of Vaughan. As I told him then, I'm ready to meet with the mayor of Vaughan at any time. As far as I know, she has not asked to meet with me, but I'm ready to meet with her. I told him I'd meet with her tomorrow, and if he wanted to come along, he could come along. That was the whole conversation. So I have no idea why he's standing up in the House right now asking a question to which he already knows the answer. The point quite simply is, we're willing to meet with the mayor of Vaughan, I'm willing to discuss it with her, and if he wants to come along, he's more than welcome.

Mr. Prue: For the minister's edification, because obviously you don't know, your staff has already arranged a meeting for Thursday, not for tomorrow, just so that you know that. You pretend you're in the loop; you're not even in the loop.

The lead editorial in the Toronto Star says that the province should be involved in the investigation—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the members please come to order.

I return to the member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: The lead editorial in yesterday's Toronto Star quite clearly said that there should be an investigation into the allegations that have been made in the city of Vaughan. Concerned citizens have petitioned you to get involved, but you refuse to do so.

I thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me and with the mayor, albeit on Thursday. I thank you for that. But I still want to know from you, and the citizens of Vaughan want to know from you, what are you in-

tending to do following that meeting? Are you prepared to put your office to the investigation, or are you content simply to have a 15-minute meeting and wash your hands again?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: He's right: I said tomorrow, and it's Thursday instead. He's right. Okay? The other thing, Speaker, I should tell you is that he said, "She only wants to meet with you for 15 minutes." I said, "Okay, I'll meet with her for 15 minutes."

The point simply is this: Under the new Bill 130, which we hope will be passed before the end of this session, a municipality will have the right to have an inquiry of the nature we're talking about within the meaning of the bill. I'm prepared to meet with the mayor, but I am not prepared to tell anyone what we're going to do until I actually have the conversation with her as to exactly what needs to be done and what kind of an investigation or undertaking is necessary. I'm prepared to meet with her tomorrow or Thursday; it will happen this week. I'm sure we can deal with the issue at that point in time.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): My question is for my colleague the Minister of the Environment. Minister, as you know, under the previous government the Ministry of the Environment was neglected. Its budget was slashed. The number of wonderful staff people at the MOE was reduced. Ontario finally has a green government that takes the protection of the environment for future generations of Ontarians very seriously.

I know that in addition to toughening the standards for air quality, this government is working with municipalities to further protect the sources of our drinking water. Justice O'Connor had several recommendations for the government following the Walkerton inquiry. Minister, can you please tell the constituents of my riding of Perth–Middlesex and all Ontarians what you have undertaken to do to improve our drinking water and what has been done to fulfill the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the member for Perth–Middlesex, who is such a champion for the environment and clean water in this province.

On December 5 of last year, we introduced the Clean Water Act. That act has delivered on 12 more of Justice O'Connor's recommendations from the Walkerton inquiry. I am so proud to say that as of right now, we have implemented 83 of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Out of the 121 in total, 83 are now done. The Clean Water Act goes further. It will ensure that we have some of the best protected water in North America. I am so proud to be part of a government that has moved us significantly to the top of the class in terms of water protection.

Mr. Wilkinson: It's encouraging to see that our government is actually making concrete steps forward to

protect our environment, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

I hear all the time from constituents in my riding that they're worried about the quality of our air getting worse, particularly in the summertime when hot and humid days make the smog in the air worse. I know that you've been working on tougher air emission standards that Ontario desperately needs in order to move forward on reducing harmful emissions. Minister, can you please update my constituents on your vital work in this area?

Hon. Ms. Broten: There is nothing more important that we can leave for our children than clean water and clean air. We have made the biggest move on the file in 25 years by updating the standards for 40 air pollutants, and we're currently working on 15 more in the Ministry of the Environment. We've set incredibly tough limits for the largest industrial sources of smog, we continue to work with industry to move them beyond compliance, and, along with Drive Clean and our goal to ensure that we have clean, green energy, we've signed an agreement between Quebec and Ontario. We continue to work on so many more initiatives to deliver clean air to future generations, to make sure that every day in the summer will be a clean air day, not a smog day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 30(b), it being past 4 of the clock, I am now required to call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding standing order 77(b), I believe we have unanimous consent to call third reading of Bill 124 this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: You'll probably want to dispense with this one after I read it.

I move that with respect to this afternoon's debate on the motion for third reading of Bill 124, an act dealing with access to regulated professions, up to 30 minutes be allotted to the government and the remaining time available, to 5:55 p.m., shall be divided equally among the official opposition and the third party, at which time the Speaker shall interrupt and put every question necessary to dispose of the motion for third reading of Bill 124; and that in the case of any division, the bill—sorry, the bell—shall be limited to 10 minutes.

You should know that this is not printed; this is written in the finest script I've ever seen in my life. That is why, when I hand this to you, Mr. Speaker, everybody will say, "Dispense."

The Acting Speaker: Let's give this a try. Mr. Bradley has moved that—

Interjections: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

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

FAIR ACCESS TO REGULATED PROFESSIONS ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR L'ACCÈS ÉQUITABLE AUX PROFESSIONS RÉGLEMENTÉES

Mr. Colle moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions / Projet de loi 124, Loi prévoyant des pratiques d'inscription équitables dans les professions réglementées de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister for his leadoff speech.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Just to let you know in advance that I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, Khalil Ramal, the member from London-Fanshawe.

Bill 124, Mr. Speaker, as you may be well aware, is a bill that, for the first time in the province of Ontario, establishes provincial oversight over the 34 regulatory bodies that have been independent for generations. So it is quite an unprecedented bill, because as you know, whether it is the engineers or the doctors, the lawyers or the dietitians, they're all under independent authority to the regulatory powers invested in them.

1610

What this bill does is ensure that the processes for licensing and registration that these regulatory bodies have are fair, transparent and accountable, and applicant-friendly. That's the first thing Bill 124 does. It sets up a fair practices code, a fair practices process.

It also will establish, if the bill is passed, a very important resource centre, an access centre for the internationally trained. These are people who have been educated in countries throughout the world. They come to Ontario with great talent and skill, and they want to practise in their profession. In some cases, they're not quite sure where to turn, where to go. This bill would establish a resource centre, a hub that would be linked with all the community-based NGOs across the province so that people could come and get the proper counselling support and help to navigate these complex systems on how to be a licensed engineer, a licensed nurse or a licensed teacher in Ontario.

The third important part of Bill 124 is that it establishes the office of the fairness commissioner. The office of the fairness commissioner will work in conjunction with the access centre to ensure that if there are obstacles to people being accredited, there are no bureaucratic delays. People who ask for information on how to apply or why their application has never been responded to or,

if they failed, why they failed—the fairness commissioner would be their advocate, their champion.

So the bill has three component parts. It has the office of the fairness commissioner, which again acts as the central advocate for the foreign-trained professionals. Secondly, it has the access centre, which is a resource centre and also is a centre which promotes the creation of more mentorship and internship for the internationally trained in the province of Ontario. Thirdly, the transparent fair practices code would be established under this bill.

The bill is part of an overall government strategy, which is called breaking down barriers, and the breaking-down-barriers strategy of the McGuinty government is very, very much linked to Bill 124. Because with the new federal-provincial agreement signed a year ago November, the province of Ontario finally has the funding that we've never had in Ontario: \$920 million will now be invested in helping immigrants achieve success. That money has started to flow into Ontario, into expanding programs that are language-based and counselling-based. That money has finally come after over 15 years of lack of that federal funding. The good news is that that money will also help.

The second important thing that relates to Bill 124 and our breaking-down-barriers strategy is that the government of Ontario also now has full authority to sit down with the federal government in shaping policies as regards these programs that help newcomers. That's why Bill 124 is very timely, as we have signed the new federal-provincial immigration agreement. The new monies are now flowing. The Ontario government has launched the first-ever internship program for the internationally trained, where all government ministries now are beginning an internship program with people who have international experience. Also, there now is a \$5,000 international loan program for people who are foreign-trained.

Along with that, this bill and the breaking-down-barriers strategy of the government of Ontario also ensure that language training for foreign-trained individuals or anybody that is new to Ontario is now under a new robust curriculum. The \$50 million that the government of Ontario invests, usually with school boards—that program has now got a full, wholesome curriculum, with a new focus on occupation-specific English, business English and career English to ensure that these very talented newcomers, who in most cases seek more than moderate-level English or seek an elevated level of language training, can get jobs in accounting, biotech and engineering. Those are the non-credit ESL programs, which are now under my ministry. That's a very substantive \$50-million program that has now been revamped.

As we look at Bill 124, I think the best way to describe the bill to the public out there would be if I could read into the record some of the comments made by many of the experts and participants in the round tables I had across the province, whereby people gave

input in terms of how to better improve access for foreign-trained professionals and how to help them achieve their career goals. We also had public hearings here in Toronto and Hamilton. These are some of the people who wanted to be on the record in terms of how this bill would help break down these barriers for foreign-trained professionals.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, for too long in the province of Ontario we've had a brain waste. We've had too many talented people who, because of a lack of due process and a lack of opportunity, weren't able to contribute to this province. So this bill and our whole breaking-down-barriers strategy is part of turning that brain waste into a brain gain. That is critical, not only for the success of the newcomers, but it's really critical for communities across Ontario. These talented individuals can make great contributions, whether it be in the workplace, whether it be academically or whether it be in the community. So the goal of this legislation is to try to break down attitudes, to break down processes that are cumbersome and bureaucratic, and to give them help as they go through these sometimes convoluted processes of licensing and registration.

In fact, last night I was at Ryerson University, which is really a remarkable place. If you go there—I know some of you have been there. People will see the true new Ontario if they go to Ryerson, where people from every country in the world are studying and getting excellent instruction. It's a hub of student activity—adults, young learners—with great staff. The Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education is really where it's happening. If you want to see the future, you should visit Ryerson to see that school in operation. It is really an excellent source.

Last night I was at a graduation ceremony for internationally trained dietitians. The dietitians came from over 15 different countries. They were professional dietitians who had practised in their country of origin, and they came here to try and get employment as a dietitian. To be a dietitian, it's under the control of a regulatory college; there's a regulatory college even for dietitians. But these remarkable students last night—three or four of them spoke. They were so articulate and so passionate. They described the challenges they had, that by themselves they were waiting in some cases two or three years even to get in the door for a modest job, an entry-level job. Because of the program that our government has funded with Ryerson University, the Canadian association of dietitians and the College of Dietitians of Ontario, a process that used to take two, three or five years for a nationally trained dietitian has now been reduced to less than a year, where they get the acclimatization, the instruction in the nuances of working in a long-term-care facility, a hospital or a school in Ontario. The program basically blends the best of international dietary experience—maybe in Iran, Pakistan or South Africa—with the excellent instruction at Ryerson. Of those 20 dietitians who graduated last night, almost every one already had employment even before they'd completed their full course because they had gone

through that bridge training program that they have at Ryerson University.

1620

There was one very poignant case of a single mother with two children whose husband had died three months, unfortunately, after she got here. She was so jubilant that she's been able to raise her family, take this very difficult course, and now she's employed and has her accreditation as a dietitian. This is the type of success that can come as a result of working together with regulatory bodies, universities, community colleges and professional associations and investing in these talented individuals. This is how Bill 124 works in a real way. It provides resources and investment. It gets rid of the regulatory roadblocks. It also has the office of the fairness commissioner to ensure that the processes are properly dispensed with in a timely manner.

The bill is quite rigorous. I know that a lot of the people who represented the regulatory bodies thought that the bill would intrude upon their independence, but it does not do that. It recognizes the independence. On the other hand, it ensures that these bodies still function in the public interest when they are deciding who's licensed in Ontario, who's registered in Ontario. That is the key balance here. It respects the independence but ensures that the regulatory bodies are under government oversight, which they are not at this time. So the regulatory bodies now will be subject to mandatory annual reporting of their licensing admission practices. They will also be subject to audit by an independent third party to ensure that their practices are transparent, fair and without obstacles.

The fairness commissioner also has the power to order compliance, with pretty stiff measures at his or her disposal of up to \$100,000 in fines, if a regulatory body does not co-operate. I would think that most of the regulatory bodies see the fact that this legislation would complement what they are doing, but there is also a need to demonstrate that compliance is something that is necessary and the fairness commissioner has the power to ensure compliance.

Here are some of the comments I would just like to read into the record. This is from Dr. Jeffrey Reitz, who is one of the foremost experts in immigration at the University of Toronto: "I believe that Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, would make an enormously positive contribution to resolving one of the most significant problems confronting Canadian immigration today; namely, the underutilization of immigrants' skills.

"The bill addresses one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the problem—fair access to professions—and does so in a way which is innovative and effective. I believe it will also prove to be a strategic move in the broader effort to deal with the problem across the labour force. It will show leadership in demonstrating that positive action is possible, and I believe the bill may be a catalyst to generating awareness across all groups of employers of the potential that exists within

our large immigrant population." That's Dr. Jeffrey Reitz, professor of immigration at the University of Toronto.

Also, some of the regulators were very supportive—not all regulators. Here's what Mr. David Hipgrave, from the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario, said: "We support this significant step by the government of Ontario and recognize that there are many other programs and services that assist the internationally trained in the province. We support the objectives of Bill 124 and applaud" the government "for their leadership...."

Mr. Kim Allen, of the Professional Engineers Ontario, who have been quite co-operative in this initiative, said, "Our position on it is that, again, if it improves the confidence of the people of Ontario that our practices are audited and demonstrated to be fair, transparent and all that, it's good for everybody concerned."

Mr. Patrick Hynes, of the Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services, said, "When our staff or clients encounter roadblocks in the credentialing process, Bill 124 will provide us a clear channel through which issues can be resolved. We believe the fairness commissioner will give strength to the advocacy role our agency plays."

Mr. Phil Schalm, program director, community services, the Chang school of continuing education, Ryerson University, said, "We consider Bill 124 to be an appropriate and timely intervention that is supportive of our own and our partner organizations' commitment to fairness and consistency. It formalizes this dimension of our province's commitment to helping immigrants maximize their contribution to our society and economy, and, put simply, it is an extension of the array of strategies introduced by the government of Ontario and its many partners in support of the professionals we so badly need."

Murray Coolican, of the Maytree Foundation, is also senior vice-president of Manufacturers Life—as you know, Mr. D'Alessandro of Manufacturers Life has taken a great leadership role. Also, Mr. Nixon at the Royal Bank has taken this critical leadership role, ensuring that employers become part of the solution.

Mr. Murray Coolican from the Maytree Foundation said, "So what difference will Bill 124 make? I think it will make a significant difference. First of all, the proposed access centre will be an identifiable source of reliable information on licensure and registration for internationally trained professionals. This centre can play an important role in helping to solve the information problem and supporting immigrant professionals in charting their own path and understanding their options. At TRIEC," the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, which helps link business with newcomers, "we know from our experiences with immigrant professionals and the institutions they interact with that there are very complex systems that need to be simplified into a clear path that can be navigated in a reasonable time." That's Murray Coolican from Manulife Financial.

Thomas Qu from CPAC, the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada: "Well, I know there are a lot of

things that can be done and a lot of considerations like people already raised during this consultation process. But I believe what is inside Bill 124 today is a practical and also a balanced approach.”

Danny Mui from the Centre for Information and Community Services of Ontario: “CICS is in a strong position in supporting Bill 124. We support the principle of the bill to advance equitable access to regulated professions in Ontario. We are also delighted to see the introduction of the access centre for internationally trained individuals....”

These are samples of some of the supporters of the bill. Again, across this province there have been thousands of people who have come to public meetings saying we need to break down these barriers, we have to give resources to newcomers and we have to ensure that the regulatory bodies are answerable to the government.

I want to also read you a quote from Judge George Thomson, whom I've had long discussions with and who authored the very important Thomson report. What he says is really the essence of this bill: “When internal registration and appeal processes are effective, fair, and well understood, applicants are less likely to feel the need for an independent appeal or to feel aggrieved by a registration” process.

What we are doing in this bill is ensuring that applicants, and thankfully we have thousands who come to Ontario every year, have not only legislative support with this legislation, which ensures that the regulatory bodies now have to be accountable—they are not now; they're now self-governing without oversight—but it also establishes a centre that will have the ability to give counselling, support and information, link them to all the immigrant service hubs across the province and also work with other government bodies to ensure that foreign-trained individuals get proper advice, counselling and support.

As I said, it also sets up the office of the fairness commissioner. So the bill is fair and balanced. It recognizes the independence of the regulatory bodies, but tells the regulatory bodies they now have to be subject to annual reporting, they have to comply and they will work together with the fairness commissioner and the access centre to essentially make sure that these talented individuals get the support they need. There are these conflicting bureaucratic practices because these 34 bodies have a variation of different rules and regulations. This at least gives some sense of order, some sense of fairness right across the board, whether you're going to the school of architecture or engineering or the school for dietitians.

I pass it over to my colleague from London—Fanshawe, the great riding to the west.

1630

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London—Fanshawe): It is my great pleasure to speak today regarding Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act.

First, before I start, I would like to thank my friend and colleague Mike Colle, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, for his leadership on this bill.

I think in this day and age we should celebrate the debating of this bill, because this is a very important piece of legislation before us. We in this place and in many different places at many different times, and all the elected officials from both sides of the House, have been speaking about the same issue for years and years and years, and it's about time to debate it. It's about time to get the support to pass it. Many people who come to Ontario decided to come because they see Ontario as a very good opportunity to start their life, to use their education, utilize their skills and potential to help us in Ontario to continue building this great province.

When they come to this province they face a lot of barriers. They cannot utilize their education, their skills, they cannot put their potential at the service of the people of Ontario. Our minister, due to his leadership, is trying to break those barriers, to open it up and welcome everyone to come and use his or her education, his or her skills to help us continue to maintain what we have in Ontario; as a matter of fact, to keep prospering in this province.

Thousands of people choose Ontario to be their home. They come from different parts of the globe. They come with special education, with skills. And when they come, they face those barriers. They face some kind of psychological barrier and depression. So this bill will give them a chance to utilize their potential, their skills and their abilities.

We realize we have a lot of regulatory bodies, almost 34 in Ontario, to control and regulate the professions of this province. We listened to them. We invited them to come to us and speak and we sought their advice, because it's very important to us when we put our trust in the regulatory bodies, to take their advice and dialogue with them in order to break those barriers. Despite what everybody says, most of the regulatory bodies in Ontario want to work with us. They want to help us. They want to help foreign-trained professionals to enter the professions, to be part of the great province of Ontario, to be part of the professions. That's why we listened to them. We listened carefully, and we also invited many stakeholders across Ontario to advise us. Many settlement agency programs across Ontario have been working very hard for years and years with the newcomers to help them to fit and integrate.

I will give you an example. When we went to open the committee meetings here in this place, we listened to many stakeholders, like the intercultural labour social services that came to us and told us about the importance of the passage of this bill. We went to Hamilton. We listened to many stakeholders in Hamilton. We listened to engineers. We listened to doctors, pharmacists, nurses. Different stakeholders came and advised us and told us about the importance of the bill and what has to be done in order to break the barriers, in order to create a way, a mechanism, to help all the people to fit and integrate.

Therefore, when we listened for almost four days in the committee, we listened to many, many different stakeholders, many different settlement agency programs,

and they told us about what they need. They told us about their concern. When we came to clause-by-clause, we listened to them. The clause-by-clause was a great reflection of their concern. We adjusted what they asked us to be adjusted without jeopardizing the system, without blocking our goal, which we are going to achieve, hopefully by the passage of this bill, to open up the professions for many people who want to be inside Ontario, working, able to give back to this great province.

Also, before that, our minister asked George Thomson to commission a report, and based on that report, we acted. We established a framework, the mechanism in order to go forward to break those barriers. Many people came to us and told us what they needed, and we based our judgment, our path and our direction on the Thomson report. That report took a lot of time and effort. Judge Thomson went many different directions, went to different stakeholders, went to regulatory bodies, studied the whole thing in detail and came up with a great report to advise us about the important steps we should take in order to break down those barriers, which we followed.

Even then, we continued the dialogue with the stakeholders, we continued to talk to regulatory bodies, we continued to open up to all the people to advise us and we came up with a great mechanism. I think it's a great step toward opening up for many people.

I had the chance and the privilege to visit many different communities across the province of Ontario with the Honourable Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Mike Colle. We talked to them in London, in Toronto, in Mississauga, Scarborough. He went to Ottawa, he went to Windsor, he went to Thunder Bay. Many different communities opened up and listened to him and they welcomed that step because they believe strongly that passing the bill will give them a great chance to find a life and utilize their abilities and skills in the province of Ontario.

That's why we got a lot of petitions from many different communities. A lot of groups came and endorsed this bill and supported the bill in order to give them a chance to live and to be able to practise the professions they love and the professions they went to school for for years and years and years. They put a lot of effort, a lot of time into their professions. They love to do them; they love to exercise them in Ontario. They love to utilize them in Ontario. They love to benefit Ontario. That's why we introduced this very important bill which is before us. I hope all the members of the House will support it because of the great steps.

The opposition members were with us on the committee and they listened to many different stakeholders, they listened to many newcomers, they listened to many people who are suffering from the blockage, from the barriers which they have faced for many years. I hope they support this bill quickly, because it is important. The people have been waiting for a long time. They cannot wait any more. They have a family to support. They have a life in front of them. They have skills and abilities that they want to use in the province of Ontario.

We understand the importance of the fees, which sometimes create barriers. That's why our government, in the bill, introduced a \$5,000 loan to give many newcomers, many foreign-trained professionals the ability to use this fund to pay the fees and give them the chance to participate in the exams.

Also, by creating a fairness commissioner, I think it shows the commitment of our government to passing the bill, the commitment of our government to seeing a strong bill to help many people fit and integrate. That's why this bill asks for the creation of a fairness commissioner to oversee the conduct of regulatory bodies. It's not because we think regulatory bodies in Ontario don't respect and have a mechanism to allow people to fit and integrate, but as a matter of fact, this is a great indication of our commitment.

That's why I would now invite all my colleagues in this great place to support us and, by supporting this bill, to support a new generation that chooses Canada, chooses Ontario to be their home and final destination, to give them the chance to utilize their skills, to utilize their abilities in order to help us as members of this community to continue building the great province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to participate in this debate. I will listen to the opposition, and hopefully they will support us in order to pass this great bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? I apologize; there are no questions and comments. Further debate?

1640

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to rise in the context of debate of a bill that certainly is extremely important not only to many of my constituents in the riding of Oak Ridges but across the GTA and indeed the province of Ontario.

At the outset I want to say that we, as the PC caucus, will be supporting this bill. I don't believe that there is any member of the Legislature who would take issue with the need to reduce barriers to foreign-trained professionals, those who have skills to be able to access jobs and careers in this province. We all, I believe, in this House are all too familiar with individuals who have come to this country, who have expectations of being able to participate in a very active and positive way in not only providing for their families and advancing their careers, but making a positive contribution as well to the community, only to get here to find that rather than open arms, there are significant barriers that keep them from becoming engaged in their profession.

To that end, we all welcomed the announcement of a bill that would have as its objective ensuring access to professions in this province. It did not take long, however, for us to realize that some of the most practical measures that the government should be taking to help skilled workers and foreign-trained professionals to access those jobs are in fact missing from this bill. Over the course of debate, first of all on second reading and

then again as we moved into the committee process, we in the official opposition, on behalf of many who approached us either personally or through e-mails and phone calls, and indeed those who came forward and took the time to appear before the committee, who advocated not only on behalf of themselves but on behalf of many who are in similar circumstances, pointed out very specifically to the government some steps that should be taken that would not only give voice to those individuals who have challenges entering the workforce but would result, then, in action and results. In the course of the hearings, the clause-by-clause hearings specifically—that's the period in time in the legislative process when specific amendments can be tabled, when we present the government with those specific recommendations—we were so disappointed that the government did not accept one single amendment that was proposed, whether it be by the official opposition, the PC caucus, or the third party.

I want to just take the time to review some of those amendments. As I said, overall we're going to support the bill because the intent is right and we believe that the government has some things right about this bill. But we also believe that the government has missed an opportunity, first of all, to send a signal that they really do believe in this legislative process, that they don't have all of the answers, that the legislation as prepared by the ministry was not perfect and that there would be some signal that members of this Legislature—and the public, by the way—have a role to play in developing the laws of our land. Second, there were some very specific recommendations, but because the government chose to be political and partisan in consideration of this bill, this bill is not as strong and as effective as it could be.

One of the amendments that we proposed was a crucial amendment that would have seen the process of establishing a system for having foreign work experience evaluated. The reason that we put that particular amendment forward is that it would have ensured that in the same way that there are equivalencies for certification, there would be an equivalency model developed that would enable individuals who have foreign work experience, by a very formalized process, to have that foreign work experience translated into an equivalent Canadian work experience.

The reason we put that forward is because we heard over and over again from individuals that the greatest single barrier to getting a job in this province, next only to having their credentials recognized, and that's a fairly technical process, but important—but it's one thing to have your credentials recognized, and it is yet then even a larger barrier to have someone open the door to get a job. The first question that is often asked is, "What is your Canadian work experience?" Well, what can you say? You've just arrived. You're an immigrant. You've been told by the immigration system that because you're a professional, our point system that qualifies people to actually be able to immigrate to this country gives people high marks in that rating system because they happen to

be a professional or have a professional designation. Then they come to this country and they find out, first of all, that that professional designation is worthless. So we go through that process of qualifying. This bill is intended to address a lot of those challenges that immigrants have, but what it fails to do is to address that very practical next step, and that is the issue of Canadian work experience.

We had a presentation by a company called SkillRoute. Mr. Shan Palanisamy and Jim Buchan made a presentation to the standing committee. This is a company that, for a number of years now, has been working in Ontario with a number of the colleges in developing precisely such a model that I believe would fit very well into the intent of what Bill 124 is attempting to do. I would call on the government to look very carefully at this model. Often we tend to want to reinvent the wheel and we discount people who come forward. In this particular case, I really believe it's imperative that the government pursue the work that SkillRoute has undertaken and hopefully find a way to work in partnership with them to accelerate that process in the best interests of many foreign-trained professionals.

I was disappointed in the course of the deliberations. The parliamentary assistant, Mr. Ramal, during the clause-by-clause and in response, for example, to this proposal that I made on behalf of the PC caucus to incorporate this amendment for the Canadian equivalency, said, "You don't know what you're talking about; it already exists." It's unfortunate that we have someone in a responsible position as parliamentary assistant for this ministry that has carriage of this bill to make such an incorrect statement. I mean, everybody knows that that equivalency rating does not exist for Canadian work experience. Mr. Ramal's statement concerns me because I believe it indicates that the government is not in focus, is not in tune with the very practical aspects that are so important for individuals to be able to find that job, that career position that they need. It's not enough for them to somehow be recognized by the college, not enough for their credentials to be recognized. It's very important for that to take place, but then also that there's a smooth transition and a helpful transition into a job and into a career position.

1650

What I want to do to emphasize this point is to point out to Mr. Ramal that Ratna Omidvar's statement—he is the executive director of the Maytree Foundation. He made this statement in an address to the Ontario Liberal Party annual policy development conference on February 26 of this year: "Canadian work experience is the most difficult barrier for immigrants."

Mr. Ramal directed the members of his government on the committee to vote down the amendment that I put forward that would have addressed this very issue. Why, I don't know. But as I say, I want to underscore that I believe it was a big mistake. I'm hopeful that, having voted down that amendment, at least we can recover by having, in a practical way, this issue addressed somehow.

I want to point out that we would not have been able to do the work that we did in advancing the cause of this bill without the many people who came forward to express their personal views and their personal circumstances, and I want to thank some people who took the time to meet with me in my constituency office, took the time to send me their e-mails to share their personal circumstances.

I especially would like to thank Dr. Nabil Moharib of Richmond Hill. This individual has been trying now for more than six years to get accredited as a doctor in Ontario. He shared with me many of his frustrations. I have to tell you that when you listen to these stories of individuals who have practised for many years in their country of origin—and we have a doctor shortage in this province; we have many underserved areas. To continue to see the barriers that are in place that keep people not only from practising their profession but, in many ways, frustrating them—it must be incredibly debilitating to be in a position in life when you know what you can do, you know the contribution you can make to your community and you're being held back from doing so simply because of the artificial barriers that are in place.

I also want to thank Dr. Faris Salim Hawa and Aleem Hirjee, a pharmacist from Richmond Hill, who shared their experiences and made some very positive recommendations. Mr. Martin Mol of Aurora was very helpful in making some recommendations, as well as Namratha Mary Kuruvilla from Markham. All of these individuals have personal stories that simply underscore the need for us to do something very practical to ensure that the individuals we've invited to this province and this country are given an equal opportunity and a level playing field to be able to engage in their profession and become productive in our community.

When I speak about the need for practical steps to be taken, I want to just remind the government—and I would ask Mr. Ramal and I would ask Minister Colle to familiarize themselves with this paper, which is entitled *A Time for Action. Ontario's Skilled Immigrants: Unmet Expectations, Unfulfilled Responsibilities*. This is a paper that was researched extensively by the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, over a period of many months' consultations with groups throughout Ontario. I really believe that it is a work that would benefit the government. I would ask that it not be viewed in a partisan sense but that it would be seen as very helpful to the work that the government is attempting to do.

In these recommendations put forward by John Tory, there are some 14 key points that are being recommended here to make it very practical for foreign-trained professionals and skilled immigrants to be able to transition into the workforce. The first of those recommendations is to establish a new online assessment, education and testing initiative that would help potential newcomers address the accreditation process in their country of origin before they arrive in Ontario.

This again is something that we proposed in the course of the committee hearings, and it is something that is so very practical. It takes two to three years, and sometimes as much as six years, from the time that someone applies to become an immigrant until they finally get approved. Mr. Tory's proposal is, why not start the process of getting an equivalency rating for a professional designation while the individual is still in the country of origin rather than waiting to get here and then finding that there is no job and finding that you have to start what in many cases is then another two, three, four or five-year process?

With regard to not just the equivalency rating for a professional designation, we're suggesting that we begin some of the training that can take place, some of the upgrading that can take place. Much can be done through distance learning. So we're encouraging the government to look seriously at that recommendation and also that the Canadian work experience equivalency rating can take place while someone is still in their country of origin.

The second recommendation made under Mr. Tory's proposal, *A Time For Action*, is to expand the role of our colleges and universities to bring training overseas to newcomers' countries of origin. Many of our colleges are already doing that, and they have programs in various countries around the world. We're saying, let's engage our universities and our colleges with a specific objective of ensuring that potential immigrants would have a place to go, a place to learn and to begin their training, so that when they get here, when they land on Ontario soil, they're ready to move forward and become engaged.

The third recommendation is to work with the federal government and stakeholders to review the existing immigration system. As I said earlier, I believe the current immigration system is one that sets up false expectations. It really leaves people with a sense that, because they have certain designations or a certain profession, when they get here there will be a job. That's simply not the case, and we have to do something to address the federal immigration system. We have to work cooperatively with the federal government to ensure that this matter is addressed.

The fourth recommendation of *A Time for Action* is to empower the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration by tasking all immigrant-related programs and funding through this one ministry. This will promote efficiency and focus. I believe it is extremely important that the various responsibilities—whether it be training programs, whether it be coordination, whether it be the responsibility for setting and reviewing standards for evaluating credentials of foreign-trained labour—should in fact be empowered within one ministry so that one minister has not only the authority but also the knowledge and the scope to deal with this very important issue.

1700

The fifth recommendation is to help more newcomers to settle in communities beyond the GTA where their contributions are needed. The fact is that 60% of all immigrants to Canada end up coming to Ontario, and of

that 60%, 82% settle in the GTA. Is it any wonder, then, that quite often there's competition in the same job market? Would it not make sense that we take very seriously the responsibility of encouraging—not forcing, but encouraging—individuals to look at other job markets, ensure they have the information available to them as to what is available in other job markets and ensure that there are incentives for individuals to consider areas outside the GTA where they may well want to settle?

A very good friend of mine, who is a medical doctor, was encouraged to take on his first responsibilities as a medical doctor in northern Ontario. His wife didn't want to go there; she was from Toronto. They moved there, and they're still living there 20 years later. The reason is that once they got there they found it was a wonderful community with great opportunities and a great quality of life.

I think we have a responsibility to immigrants to this country to ensure they become familiar with what is available in the rest of Ontario, what the job opportunities are and what the economic opportunities are. I believe that by doing so, we will not only help individuals but also help to improve overall economic advantages throughout the province.

The sixth recommendation of A Time for Action is more financial support. The recommendation is: "Broaden the OSAP system to make credentialing processes and bridging/upgrading courses eligible for student loans." Right now, that's not the case. We would ask the government to give very serious consideration to this. Immigrants come to this country. Very few of them have the financial resources to go through the credentialing process and the fees that are there. So we would strongly recommend that the OSAP system be extended to new Canadians who are going through this credentialing program.

The seventh recommendation is, "Use TVOntario to its full potential." We propose that we work with Ontario's colleges, universities and other relevant educators. TVO should assist in the design of those programs. They should assist in the publishing and broadcasting of language training and integration programs across the spectrum of Internet, television and video mediums. If we go back to the purpose of TVO, that really is what TVO should be all about. It's the opportunity to put some public dollars behind an important education medium.

The eighth recommendation is to enhance ESL training to provide better supports for industry-specific ESL training and other pre-employment training. Much of the ESL training that goes on now is not industry-specific. We strongly recommend that we target ESL training. The kind of language training that individuals get, if it's more industry-specific, will be much more conducive to enabling an individual to get a job when they're in a job application and they've had the background, the nuances, the language skills that relate to their particular trade or profession.

The ninth recommendation in A Time for Action, as proposed by Mr. Tory and the Ontario PC caucus, is,

"Make bridging and mentoring programs a higher priority and urgently modify and expand them for small and medium-sized businesses." I know that John Tory is someone who, while he was in the private sector, took a great deal of initiative in encouraging large corporations to take on immigrants, newcomers to this province, and create opportunities within companies so there would be an opportunity to get that Canadian experience—very successful. What we would call on the government to do is expand the kind of program initiated by Mr. Tory into small and medium-sized businesses. As a result of that, we believe we will have much more success and help people integrate into jobs.

The 10th recommendation is to ensure that funding intended for settlement and immigration purposes actually goes there. How much public money is announced with good intentions, but then the question becomes, where does it go? What we want to do is ensure that there's an appropriate focus and auditing mechanism in place. Legislation should be enacted to ensure that the monies that are intended for settlement programs are actually used for those purposes and not diverted into general revenues or other programs.

The 11th recommendation is to establish and expand the various doctor assistant programs. Foreign-trained doctors whose qualifications have been verified can shadow a doctor and/or under the supervision of a mentor doctor provide basic services, and especially in under-served areas. This is something that would be so welcome. I have foreign-trained doctors coming into my office virtually every week, saying, "Look, I understand that I have to get some up upgrading. I understand that I need some additional training. But give me an opportunity to at least work in an environment where I can assimilate some of the nuances of the medical practice." John Tory is recommending that we give specific attention to these various doctor assistant programs, put the necessary resources behind them and ensure that these individuals will receive the kind of support and training that they so much deserve.

The 12th recommendation is career mentoring. The recommendation involves a province-wide system of career mentoring for newcomers in their areas offered through groups such as Skills for Change. Such groups can use these funds to broaden or begin mentoring services. Nothing is more important than having individuals spend time, be shoulder to shoulder, be in the environment with individuals they know, whom they can relate to; ideally, those who speak their mother tongue, those who understand the culture and can be there to point out what the particular nuances are of this culture and help them transition and integrate into the Canadian and the Ontario workplace.

The 13th recommendation is setting standards for services to newcomers. We need to improve the speed and efficiency of the services that we offer to newcomers. The notion of service benchmarks, guidelines and courses of redress needs to be expanded across many more areas. To that end, we believe that Bill 124 will

play a very important role in ensuring that those benchmarks are achieved. That's why we're supporting this bill. We believe that it's going to be a very important aspect of ensuring that newcomers are much more readily integrated into the job market.

Finally, the 14th recommendation of John Tory's A Time for Action is to hold an annual summit of stakeholders. We believe that the situation faced today by skilled immigrants in Ontario is an urgent challenge. In light of this, the Ontario government should hold an annual summit of stakeholders interested in, working with and affected by skilled immigrant recruitment, credentialing and integration issues, mandated to measure progress and provide accountability to the sector. No one has more of a vested interest in ensuring that skilled immigrants, skilled workers, foreign-trained professionals, become integrated into the Ontario workplace and into the Ontario economy. We have such a lack of skilled workers in this province, and yet all too often foreign-trained skilled workers are having a difficult time accessing those jobs.

I have reviewed in some detail the 14 key points of A Time for Action. I want to extend an invitation to anyone who may be listening to this debate, following the debate, to come forward. We look forward to having many more of the recommendations. Nobody knows better than the individuals who are on the front lines, who are experiencing the challenges of integrating into the workforce, as to what the solutions are.

1710

We will be supporting this bill. I commend the government for coming forward with this initiative. We are disappointed that the government did not accept one of our recommendations which would have in fact made the bill a much better bill, would have ensured much more practical integration. However, we made the effort.

With that I will rest my case. We look forward to continuing to work with the broader community to ensure that in the province of Ontario not only is there a message that immigrants are welcome here, but to ensure that when people arrive here there are open doors to them, not only in terms of credentialing, not only in terms of recognizing their professions, which is primarily what this bill recognizes, but that there are also practical ways that individuals can become integrated into our community, can find the jobs and can in fact become productive members of our society.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): It's not with any great or particular pleasure that I rise to address this bill today, because I see this bill as, unfortunately, a very, very large lost opportunity.

When we look around us, when we look at the situation that faces this province, when we look at the situation that faces new Canadians, we see a problem that is both a crisis and a scandal, a situation that puts people's lives into a deep-freeze that has a huge impact on our economy.

I want to address first the crisis that's seen in new Canadian communities. New Canadians are arriving in

this country by the tens of thousands to build our society, to build our community, to build Ontario. They're coming from prestigious universities around the world. They're coming from positions where they have exercised great responsibility, where they've had to have a background of demanding, professional training, where they've had substantial experience. They come to Canada, they come to Ontario to make a contribution to our economy. They come to make a contribution to our society. They come to provide a good life for themselves and their children. And yet, they are being left in the waiting room. They're pumping gas, they're putting groceries on shelves, they are writing parking tickets, they're driving cabs.

These are people who have come to Canada with tremendous hope, a feeling that their lives are to start over. They have confidence that their credentials and their experience are going to put them to work, are going to stand them in good stead. For too many of them, the first shock is finding that their credentials, their background, their years of experience are largely of no consequence: "So what? You don't have Canadian experience. You don't have Canadian credentials. We're not impressed. Frankly, not only are we not impressed, but we don't think we're going to recognize those credentials."

So people scramble. They spend money on courses, they try extensive job searches, they apply for recognition of their credentials. For many of them, they come here with their life savings—everything. They bring all that they have in an effort, in a hope to come and establish a life. When they come here and have those first shocks, they realize that they're spending their money—they're spending their money on courses, on rent and on social supports—while they desperately go around looking for jobs, looking for recognition. Eventually, many of these people run out of their life savings and they're faced with a very stark choice: Do they stay and take a survival job—and a "survival job" is what it's called. If they take that survival job, if they're from a profession—and most of them are like this—that is fast-changing, one that requires people to be completely current with what's happening in their field, they know that their chances of returning to that career are largely gone. Do they move on to another province? Do they move on to another country? Do they go home? They are faced with very stark choices. That is why, for many people in Canada, in new Canadian communities, there is a crisis related to their credentials and related to their employment. For those who stay and take a survival job, there's an engendering of bitterness, despair, anger and desperation.

I talk to people in and outside my riding who see corrosion of their families, who see lack of support for their children, who see development of social problems that shouldn't be developing, because the people who come here have the intelligence, the experience and the skill to contribute in a very high-level way to our society.

So I want to talk a bit about some statistics to back up this point that we are seeing a crisis in the new Canadian community. When we were in Hamilton, one of the

organizations that presented to us was called Human Endeavour. They noted that six in 10 immigrants are forced to change their careers when they come to Canada—the majority. That's a lot of lost skill, training and experience—the majority. According to HRDC, Canada loses one in six of its newcomers within the first year because they are unable to integrate. That's a very large volume of people coming in and moving on. I've had some people refer to Ontario as the waiting room for Alberta, as the waiting room for the United States. We give them a base in North America, they do what they can here and then they move on. It's a huge waste of potential opportunity for us and for them.

Food bank usage in the greater Toronto area: In 1995, 12% of the immigrant households using food banks were headed by immigrants with at least some university education. By 2002, that became 59% of immigrant households using food banks. Almost 60% of the immigrant households using food banks in the GTA were people who had higher education and were not being allowed, were not able to access work in their careers in the areas where they had been trained.

According to Stats Canada, in 2001 the earnings for recent immigrants in the year 2000 had dropped on average by \$6,200 per year compared to new immigrants in the early 1980s. That's a very substantial drop in income at the same time that average income in Canada has been rising. So we're bringing in more people with a higher level of training, a higher level of skill, and yet they're seeing their incomes drop. This is a substantial problem. It is a problem that continues to deteriorate.

1720

Now, I spoke about the crisis. There is a scandal: that this waste of resources, this casting of people's lives into limbo, is completely unnecessary. It does not have to happen. It can be corrected. During the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty spoke to this issue. He promised to take action within a year of being elected. He would make sure that regulatory bodies would change their practices so that people's credentials would be certified. It wasn't corrected within a year. But within about a year Judge Thomson was appointed to write a report on the institution of independent tribunals for decisions by registering bodies, by colleges, by boards. In fact, in 2004, there was a government question placed by Kathleen Wynne to then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Mary Anne Chambers:

“Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's certainly not a secret to anyone in this House that providing access to professions and trades for internationally trained professionals is vital to our workforce and our economy. Since we formed government, I know we've done substantial work on working with Ontario's regulatory bodies and by providing several bridge training programs to provide our internationally trained with Canadian work experience.

“But about 70% of the residents of the neighbourhoods of Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park in my riding are recent immigrants to Canada. Many of

them received approval for their applications to immigrate to Canada specifically because of the points they got for their professional credentials, but when they got here, they discovered that their credentials aren't the ones Canada's regulatory bodies accept. More than that, they're frustrated by the fact that the process to appeal an accreditation decision by a regulatory body varies widely among the professions and trades, with no common standard.” In 2004, a recognition of the need for a common standard, for independent tribunals. “Minister, could you talk about what steps our government is taking to address this issue?

“Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): We are closely committed to improving the access of internationally trained individuals to professions and trades in Ontario. With regard to the process for accreditation and licensure, many refer to that process as being confusing and arbitrary.” I agree with the minister.

“I do want to say that I've been working with the regulators over the past several months, and many of them are making really good progress. But it is a fact that the processes vary greatly from one regulatory body to another. Very recently I appointed former Ontario Justice George Thomson to review all these processes and the appeals opportunities that go along with these processes. I have asked him to recommend to me an appropriate process for independent appeals.”

I think it was pretty clear at the time what was being asked. It was pretty clear at the time the direction the minister was going in. It was pretty clear at the time what instructions were being given to Judge Thomson. So he set about developing his report. He talked to an awful lot of folks. He talked to people in the colleges; he talked to ministries; he talked to community organizations; he talked to non-health regulators. There are four pages of organizations that he talked to. His consultations were extensive and his conclusions and recommendations were very clear. In November 2005, he submitted his report to then Minister Mike Colle—things have changed—and I want to just read to you how Judge Thomson saw his mandate, what he saw his purpose was:

“Dear Minister Colle:

“I am pleased to enclose my report on appeals from the registration and licensure decisions of Ontario regulatory bodies that oversee professions and determine whether applicants shall be permitted to practise a profession in Ontario or to use specific professional designations....

“In her referral of September 2004, Minister Chambers asked me to examine current appeal processes for registration or licensure decisions made by professional regulatory bodies of Ontario's self-regulated professions and to make recommendations for independent appeal mechanisms.... I have set out what, in my view, should be the characteristics of a strong, independent appeal body. I have also made recommendations with respect to the internal procedures of regulatory bodies, consistent with my view that improving these procedures will minimize the number of appeals, while also making it

possible for those appeals that do proceed to be well heard and resolved.”

I think he was pretty clear on his mandate. His mandate was to set up a system of independent appeal tribunals, a recommendation on how that would be carried out. He wanted to make sure that the system’s underlying registration processes were clear and ones that people generally could rely on so that independent appeals were not everyday, but relatively rare occurrences so that we would have, in some ways, an independent review and in some way a discipline or a governance imposed on self-regulating bodies so that details would be heard, practices would be changed and people would feel that they weren’t being locked out. However, he went on and he brought forward his recommendations. Of the 22 recommendations, six—more than a quarter—refer to the need to set up these independent tribunals. He talked about available decisions, what decisions people could appeal, what the grounds would be for appeal, the notice of appeal, the remedies on appeal, procedural elements of independent appeal, adjudicators, structure and location of appeal body.

He talked about what actually had to happen to set up independent appeals to deal with the problem identified by the minister and in response to the mandate he had been given. So in June of this year, Bill 124 came forward and the heart of the mandate that had been given to Judge Thomson, the core of his report around which other pieces were built, was missing. Bill 124 did not include independent appeal tribunals; it did not deal with a central process or piece of what was needed to put things right in the whole process of registration in this province.

I know that recognition of credentials is only part of the solution. It’s a vital part but it is only a part.

I want to talk about what we should be doing, because I would say that virtually everyone in this Legislature would know what has to be done to address the problem. A lot of organizations have been writing about this for years. We know how to improve the lives of internationally educated professionals. In broad terms, we need to do a few things, and one is to tell people who are considering moving to Ontario what the real situation is, to tell them what the real potential is for them to gain employment in the areas where they’ve been trained, where they have experience, where they have a commitment.

I’ve talked to people from China, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh and from eastern Europe who came to this country not knowing how high the wall was that they would have to climb to actually use their skills. A number of people said to me, “If I had known, I would not have come here.” They had a commitment in their lives to a particular profession, a particular area where they could use their skills, and they did not realize that for the majority who come here, the ability to use those skills and that training will not be available to them. The federal immigration department didn’t tell them and, frankly, we in Ontario haven’t told them. I’ll talk a bit more about that later.

I would say that the first thing we have to do is tell people the truth, tell people what the real situation is in Ontario before they gamble their life savings, before they take that very big leap of moving to this country.

Interjection: It’s a great country.

Mr. Tabuns: It is a great country, it’s a fabulous country, and if we actually acted to welcome people and give them the opportunity to use their skills, it would be an even greater country than it is.

Outside of that question, first of all, of telling people the truth is the question of helping people get inside the door for that first job. It’s a Catch-22. It’s a chicken-and-egg situation. People need to be able to say that they have Canadian work experience to get jobs, but to get jobs, they have to have Canadian work experience. We have to break that logjam. We need programs that are substantive, that are much bigger than the 70 internship positions for internationally educated professionals that have been offered with the Ontario government. We need investment so that thousands of people, not a few score, get the support to get in the door, get the training, get the technical and social support so they can actually get that experience in Canada, develop the familiarity with our culture, and we in turn develop familiarity with their culture.

1730

It’s costing them, but it’s also costing our economy. The Conference Board of Canada calculates that the impact on Canada’s gross domestic product by under-employing people is in the range of \$3 billion to \$5 billion per year. Someone who’s earning \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year driving a cab, who should be earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 a year working as an engineer, pharmacist or doctor, is a huge loss of income to this country as a whole, and this province, Ontario, is losing tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue. If these people were employed at the level they need to be employed at, at the level they deserve to be employed at, we would be in a position to build an economy in Ontario that fully utilizes the intelligence, skills and commitment of all the people who live here, and right now we’re not doing that.

Outside of the elements I just talked about, within the bill itself we need an independent tribunal. Judge Thomson had a few other things to say about independent tribunals.

“Finding 1: importance of independent appeals

“With regulatory bodies making decisions as important as whether individuals are permitted to practise a profession or hold themselves out as members of a particular profession, access to an independent appeal is vital.” I think that’s pretty straightforward, pretty clear. “Well-developed, transparent, independent appeal mechanisms enhance public confidence in the overall registration process. Independent appeals constitute an accountability mechanism that fosters due diligence and promotes high-quality internal procedures and a concerted effort to avoid or remedy errors so that appeals will not be launched.”

That’s pretty clear language as to why we need one, as to why he was appointed in the first place, as to why this

bill needs within it a provision for independent appeals tribunals. That's something that many agreed with: the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Pakistani Professionals Forum, the Canadian Tamil Congress, the Chinese Canadian National Council, the Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto chapter, the certified management accountants of Bangladesh, Canadian chapter, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OCASI, and many others.

The independent tribunal is a core piece of what's needed to make the regulatory system work in Ontario. It's not in this bill. Again, not enough; we know that in the medical profession, doctors in particular, we have independent tribunals, but we still have a significant problem. Independent tribunals do not solve all our problems but they're a significant and necessary component of the bill.

Our party, the NDP, recommended that the access centre that's being set up be given the task, the mandate, to assess not only the educational credentials of those coming from overseas but to assess the credentials or the standards set by regulatory bodies and other jurisdictions, so that not only our own regulatory bodies, our colleges and our boards would know precisely the value and quality of those standards in other jurisdictions but applicants, those who want to become our pharmacists, engineers and accountants, would be able to say when they apply, "The government of Ontario has assessed the standards to which I have been accountable for many years, and they have concluded that they are equivalent to the standards in this province. You should be certifying me." Level the playing field so that those credentials are assessed and those applicants have the support they need. That was not adopted by the government in the course of clause-by-clause debate. It was a lost opportunity. It's an opportunity that will be a while in being addressed, a while before it gets addressed again.

Another matter that came up was the need to have a concerted effort to eliminate bias from our activities and have that concerted effort very consciously built into the whole way we assess individuals and that we assess regulatory bodies that assess individuals. What did the subcommittee with a Liberal majority do with those amendments? First of all, it should be noted that the bill they introduced didn't include an independent appeal tribunal, although the minister called for it in 2004, although Judge Thomson explicitly had been told to bring back recommendations on how to do it, even though Judge Thomson's report not only showed how to do it but also talked about how independent tribunals would make for a better system.

What they did include in their bill was the institution of a fairness commissioner and an access centre. Let's look at those for a moment. The fairness commissioner will be an appointee of cabinet. We in the NDP think that this should be a far more significant position, that the fairness commissioner should report to the Legislature,

like the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, like the Auditor General, like the Ombudsman. Their power and their authority have to be substantial to deal with the scope of the problem before us. That was not adopted by the government.

Something that has to be noted is that the fairness commissioner does not have a duty or power to intervene in individual cases where there's unfairness. Now, I've talked to a lot of people in the activist community, internationally educated professionals, who think that that is the job of the fairness commissioner, that they will step in when there's unfairness in an individual case and take corrective action. I just want to say to those who have followed this debate, that's not there. In fact, it's explicitly prohibited in the bill. The fairness commissioner cannot intervene in individual cases. You've got to know that.

The commissioner will review registration practices to see if they're fair, transparent and impartial, and order audits where he has concerns. This may be useful—it remains to be seen—but I don't think it compares to the establishment of an independent tribunal that people can appeal to. We'll see. We know that it won't compare; we'll see if it's useful.

The other aspect of this bill is the access centre. What I find strange is that this is being codified in law when, frankly, you could simply, as the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, just set it up with an allocation of budget funds. You—Citizenship and Immigration—have already got a toll-free number. You have a website. I assume there are people behind it who are answering the e-mail inquiries, the phone inquiries. You have the nucleus of it, in any event. If you go to settlement.org you can see that there are people working on providing information. If you go to another website, ontarioimmigration.ca, it has many pages of information and a section on how people can become employed in their professions in this province. I want to say that I actually took the opportunity yesterday to go through that website, ontarioimmigration.ca. Indeed, I found it a revelation, because all along I felt that the federal government had been derelict in not telling people what the situation was in Canada, and that's still true. But, frankly, it's not just that; it's a question of the provincial government being as derelict as Mr. Harper and Mr. Martin before him.

If you look at the Ontario immigration website, there's a page called "Before You Arrive." Part of this is quite accurate and true: "Ontario is a land of opportunity. It is a prosperous, democratic society built by the hard work of generations of immigrants." I can't argue with that; it's true. "We hope that you will decide to make Ontario your new home.

"Our people are our greatest asset, and we welcome the talent and energy that newcomers bring to our province. In return, we offer opportunities and a quality of life that are second to none."

There's no mention that the majority of people who come here who are trained as professionals can't work in their career; there's no mention of the growing number of

professionals, according to the Daily Bread Food Bank, who are accessing the food bank even though they have college level and higher, university level and higher.

On the page, under “Work in Your Profession,” they say:

“It is important to realize that Ontario’s requirements for getting a licence may not be the same as other Canadian provinces. For example, different courses or more experience may be necessary in some fields.

“In most regulated occupations, immigrants trained internationally have to go through several steps to meet Ontario’s licensing requirements....

“And you will probably be required to take examinations to demonstrate your competence to practise your profession.”

The last paragraph is the best:

“If you find there are gaps in your education or experience, you may consider taking courses, improving your language skills or getting more work experience.”

1740

Where do they get that work experience? Where do they find out that in fact it’s Canadian work experience they need and that isn’t readily available to someone who doesn’t have Canadian work experience? No information on the real situation in Ontario. In this account, there’s every reason to continue to berate the federal government for its lack of honesty with people considering coming to this country, but we in Ontario have to look at what we do and what we say to people, because we too are not telling them what’s really going on.

Going back to the bill itself, there was some pressure from the community and some pressure from our party, and I was pleased to see that the government actually listed the professions that will be covered by the act in the act itself.

There was an amendment we put forward requiring regulatory bodies to let people know what their appeal rights were, in situations where appeals were available, when a decision was given to them about their registration. That was a useful thing. But a number of other amendments that were important and effective were spurned. They didn’t set up the independent tribunal, as I’ve said, but they did an amazing thing. They moved an amendment to give the fairness commissioner power to include an analysis of the possibility of establishing a tribunal to hear appeals of registration decisions. Wow. That’s quite something. As if the last three years didn’t exist, as if Judge Thomson had never been told to go out and look at this issue, as if Judge Thomson had never talked to anyone, as if he had never actually written a report.

He has already done that work, and yet that work has been set aside. But we do have legislation telling the fairness commissioner that he or she may come back and report on this. I would think you don’t need a law to tell the fairness commissioner that he can report on an independent tribunal. But I would say that it does work well if you have an election coming up and you want to say in your literature, “Independent appeal tribunal still on the agenda. We’re working on it.” You know all the

clichés: “Rome not built in a day,” “We’re moving toward it,” “We’re working toward it,” “Yes, it’s developing.” It’s quite extraordinary to me that that amendment was put in with no consideration of what had happened over the past few years.

One of the other amendments that we asked they put in was support by trained advocates for people who go forward to appeal. If you’re born here, you find our process for approvals complex. But for people coming from very different cultures, it can be a complete labyrinth, and it made entire sense that people were provided with support. The cards are stacked against them. There were no votes forthcoming to support the idea of providing internationally educated professionals with that kind of backup, that kind of advocacy when they do appeal.

Another area that was raised by the community is that of discrimination and bias. In 2004, an organization called the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades published a paper in the public interest about this whole question of recognition of credentials. One of the issues they touched on was discrimination and bias. They looked at an article done by some prominent lawyers in this city—Mary Cornish, Elizabeth McIntyre and Amanda Pask—in 2001 in the Canadian Labour and Employment Law Journal. They spoke about discrimination, and PROMPT quoted them. PROMPT says, “They contend that the barriers faced by internationally educated professionals have been seen to constitute ‘systemic discrimination’ on the basis of at least their place of origin and arguably, also, depending on the facts, on the basis of their ethnic origin, ancestry, race, colour and/or gender.”

PROMPT, in its paper, interviewed a number of people familiar with the issues in this field. Two of their key informants “expressed a concern that there is much discrimination toward certain countries, while degrees and experience from white, British or European countries tend to be accepted much more easily.”

These concerns were echoed in the presentations of a number of organizations, who asked explicitly that the government require training for those who assess credentials: anti-discrimination training and cultural competency training. They asked that those who look at the examinations that are put together have that training and that those examinations, those assessments, be informed and shaped by anti-discrimination training. They asked that the auditors be trained in anti-discrimination and have a human rights background—that they have those skills. That did not come forward. Not one piece of that was adopted.

There are fundamental problems with this bill that cannot be fixed later through regulation. The bill doesn’t include the independent tribunals. That can’t be added by cabinet later.

I know that people need action. Even when that action is limited, even when that action falls far short of what would really make a substantial difference in people’s lives, they need to see some forward movement. That’s unfortunate, because this bill doesn’t fulfill those needs.

It speaks to not half a loaf; perhaps a crust, a small part of what actually has to be addressed. It doesn't meet the mandate that was originally put forward by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's a bill that may have some positive impact, but will not actually move the framework, move the situation in a way that will deal either with the crisis or the scandal. It's a small bill; it has great limitations.

In the course of the hearings, I heard many people who supported the bill saying, "We need to get it through right away. There's no time for amendments." I found it curious that there was a concern about the speed, because there was no sense whatsoever that this bill was going to be slowed up by anyone. I found it odd that there was concern that there should be no amendments, when it was very clear that amendments had to happen. I know over the next nine months there will be a lot of announcements, but I have no doubt that a year from now, two years from now, these issues will still be debated, these issues will still be of great concern in the community and these issues will still have an impact on our society and our economy. That is a very difficult reality to contem-

plate. It's a reality that no one wants to continue but which will be here with us.

The government has the power in its hands to correct this problem. It's unfortunate that it did not use the power at its disposal.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Colle has moved third reading of Bill 124. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until later on this evening at 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1749.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2006 sur l'amélioration du système de santé, projet de loi 171, M. Smitherman	
Adoptée	6870
Loi de 2006 modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités (élection au scrutin général du président du conseil régional de Durham), projet de loi 172, M. Ouellette	
Adoptée	6870
Loi de 2006 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne l'Assemblée législative, projet de loi 173, M^{me} Bountrogianni	
Adoptée	6871

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2006 modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation (apprentissage jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans), projet de loi 52, M^{me} Wynne	
Adoptée	6876
Loi de 2006 sur l'accès équitable aux professions réglementées, projet de loi 124, M. Colle	
Adoptée	6901

CONTENTS

Tuesday 12 December 2006

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Government's record	
Mr. O'Toole.....	6867
Mr. Klees.....	6868
Energy conservation	
Mr. Tabuns.....	6867
Employment	
Mr. Gravelle.....	6867
City of North Bay	
Mr. Miller.....	6868
Family doctors	
Mr. Delaney.....	6868
Toys for Tots	
Mr. Mauro.....	6868
Holiday activities	
Mr. Rinaldi.....	6869
Mr. McNeely.....	6869

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Standing committee on general government	
Mr. Flynn.....	6869
Report adopted.....	6870

FIRST READINGS

Health System Improvements Act, 2006, Bill 171, Mr. Smitherman	
Agreed to.....	6870
Municipal Amendment Act (Direct Election of Durham Regional Council Chair), 2006, Bill 172, Mr. Ouellette	
Agreed to.....	6870
Mr. Ouellette.....	6870
Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 173, Mrs. Bountrogianni	
Agreed to.....	6871
Mrs. Bountrogianni.....	6871

MOTIONS

Appointment of acting chief medical officer of health	
Mr. Bradley.....	6871
Agreed to.....	6871
House sittings	
Mr. Bradley.....	6871
Agreed to.....	6872

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Health care	
Mr. Smitherman.....	6872
Mrs. Witmer.....	6874
Ms. Martel.....	6875
Mandatory retirement	
Mr. Peters.....	6873
Mr. Martiniuk.....	6874
Ms. Horwath.....	6874

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government spending	
Mr. Tory.....	6878
Mr. McGuinty.....	6878
Mr. Smitherman.....	6880
Mr. Duncan.....	6880
Executive compensation	
Mr. Hampton.....	6880
Mr. Duncan.....	6880, 6882
Mr. Tory.....	6882
Property taxation	
Ms. DiNovo.....	6883
Mr. Sorbara.....	6883
Apprenticeship training	
Mrs. Mitchell.....	6883
Mr. Bentley.....	6883
Ms. Papatello.....	6884
Children's aid societies	
Ms. MacLeod.....	6884
Mrs. Chambers.....	6884
Electricity supply	
Mr. Tabuns.....	6885
Mr. Duncan.....	6885, 6886
Mr. Yakabuski.....	6886
High-occupancy vehicle lanes	
Mr. Flynn.....	6885
Mrs. Cansfield.....	6885
Municipal government	
Mr. Prue.....	6887
Mr. Gerretsen.....	6887
Water quality	
Mr. Wilkinson.....	6887
Ms. Broten.....	6887

THIRD READINGS

Education Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18), 2006, Bill 52, Ms. Wynne	
Agreed to.....	6876

Fair Access to Regulated Professions

Act, 2006, Bill 124, Mr. Colle	
Mr. Colle.....	6888
Mr. Ramal.....	6891
Mr. Klees.....	6892
Mr. Tabuns.....	6896
Agreed to.....	6901

OTHER BUSINESS

Estimates	
Mr. Sorbara.....	6867
Visitors	
Mr. McMeekin.....	6869
Mr. O'Toole.....	6869
Ms. DiNovo.....	6869
Mr. Ruprecht.....	6869
Ms. Wynne.....	6875
Mr. Patten.....	6878
Sheela Basrur	
Mr. Smitherman.....	6876
Mr. Watson.....	6876
Mrs. Witmer.....	6877
Ms. Martel.....	6878
Order of business	
Mr. Bradley.....	6888
Agreed to.....	6888

Continued overleaf