

No. 138A



N° 138A

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 18 December 2006

Lundi 18 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Copies of Hansard

Copies of Hansard can be purchased from Publications Ontario: 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N8. e-mail: webpubont@gov.on.ca

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Exemplaires du Journal

Des exemplaires du Journal sont en vente à Publications Ontario : 880, rue Bay Toronto (Ontario), M7A 1N8 courriel : webpubont@gov.on.ca

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Monday 18 December 2006

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Lundi 18 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HIGHWAY 6

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): In my very first member's statement in this House, in November 1990, I called upon the government of the day to move forward with improvements to Highway 6 through the county of Wellington, including the construction of passing lanes. The need for repairs to Highway 6 was identified by my predecessor as the MPP for Wellington, Jack Johnson, in the late 1980s.

Highway 6 is the most important north-south corridor in the county of Wellington, from Wellington North to the Puslinch township. It is our main route to the city of Guelph, our pathway to the 401 and our gateway to the markets of the world. Highway 6 is critical to the continued economic success of our county.

In 2003, it appeared to me that we needed to redouble our efforts to improve our transportation infrastructure. Working with our municipal councils, we developed the Waterloo–Wellington Transportation Action Plan. Improvements to Highway 6 were a key component of our plan, and I'm pleased to inform the House that the Ministry of Transportation has recently called for tenders to rebuild Highway 6 from Fergus north to Arthur. The work will include repairs, bridge repair and new passing lanes and is estimated to be a \$20-million job.

We should express our appreciation to the Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Transportation, staff at MTO's southwest regional office in London, and Wellington county council and staff, especially Councillor Lynda White.

I continue to advocate for all the projects in the Waterloo–Wellington Transportation Action Plan that are outstanding to make our roads safer, support local economic development and improve our transit for the 21st century.

DARREN COOGAN

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I'm pleased to rise today to inform the House of a ceremony held recently at the Sikh Spiritual Centre in Rexdale to honour Darren Coogan and Satwinder Bajwa,

which I had the pleasure to attend with several of my constituents. The event garnered a full-page picture and an article in the GTA section of the Toronto Star. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes.

On November 11, Mr. Bajwa was involved in a serious collision in which the utility van he drove for work crashed and erupted into flames after hitting a deer. Mr. Bajwa was trapped inside with a broken hip as the chemicals he uses for his employment as a bus mechanic quickly caught on fire, turning the van into a deadly inferno. In a totally selfless act, Mr. Coogan broke the window with only his elbow, pulling Mr. Bajwa out and undoubtedly saving his life.

Please join me, along with my constituents of Brampton West–Mississauga, in commending Mr. Coogan for his heroic act and to wish Mr. Bajwa a full and speedy recovery. Thank you, Darren, for your selfless act, and thank you, Mr. Bajwa, for recognizing him in one of the most beautiful ways possible.

**CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING
CEREMONY**

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It was quite an evening on Saturday, December 9 at Logos Land, just outside of Cobden, in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, when Canada's tallest Christmas tree was switched on. The tree is a whopping 80 feet tall and is illuminated by 13,000 LED bulbs. This year's celebration was attended by nearly 5,000 people, who came to dedicate the lighting to the brave men and women of our armed forces serving in Afghanistan and their families.

Special guests at the ceremony were none other than our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, and his daughter, Rachel. Joining the Prime Minister and Rachel on the stage were Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke MP Cheryl Gallant; Colonel Denis Thompson, commander of 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group; and two elementary school students, Megan Gruhl and Nathan Layman, who, along with Colonel Thompson, tripped the switch to light the tree. I was honoured to be asked by event co-ordinator Bruce McIntyre to sing our national anthem for this very special occasion.

It is never an easy time to be serving in our armed forces as they work to bring peace, order, democracy and freedom to the people of Afghanistan. To be separated from their families at this special time of year makes it even harder. The people of Renfrew–Nipissing–

Pembroke wanted to let them know how much we appreciate the noble work they do and how much we support them in their mission. To have the Prime Minister there to help deliver that message, broadcast live to the troops, was just fantastic. To the organizers of the event, a big thank you. To our troops, Merry Christmas, God bless you, and we pray for a successful mission and a safe return to your families.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce Jim MacDonald. Jim MacDonald lives on Manitoulin Island, in your very own riding of Algoma–Manitoulin. I have spoken about Mr. MacDonald in this House before, and he honours us all with his presence here today.

Jim lives with cancer and is a recipient of ODSP benefits. He is the father of five children, ages seven to 17. His wife used to work, until she found out that the policies of this government have made it nearly impossible. She realized that ODSP's incentives for employment were costing the family more than she actually earned. Jim is confused as to why you have decided to benefit yourselves and ourselves financially during this season of goodwill instead of honouring your commitment to end the clawback and give social service recipients a decent increase. Jim's children lose about \$350 each and every month that you continue to claw back the NCBS that the federal government provides. During this holiday season, Jim is hoping for word that, along with yourselves, you will start caring for our lowest-income kids by honouring your promise to them to end the clawback.

He is also hoping against hope that this government will develop policies that reward those like his spouse for trying to provide for their family rather than take every single penny she is able to earn back to yourselves.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

PROGRAMME D'APPRENTISSAGE POUR LES JEUNES DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Last week, I had the pleasure of making an announcement on behalf of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Last Monday, Minister Bentley announced an extra \$8.25-million investment in the Ontario youth apprenticeship program.

Le programme d'apprentissage pour les jeunes de l'Ontario est un programme de transition de l'école au travail offert dans les écoles secondaires de la province. Les élèves à plein temps des 11^e et 12^e années obtiennent des crédits d'éducation coopérative en faisant des stages dans des métiers spécialisés.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board received \$153,000; the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board received \$118,000.

Le gouvernement octroie aussi 97 000 \$ au Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien. Finalement, le Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario a reçu 96 000 \$.

There is a record number of students participating in the OYAP program to date. In Ottawa alone, it is projected that in 2006-07, about 3,125 Ottawa-area students will benefit from this program.

Le nombre grandissant d'élèves qui participent au PAJO rapproche le gouvernement de son objectif de porter à 26 000 le nombre d'inscriptions annuelles à la formation en apprentissage en 2007-2008.

OYAP gives students more options and opportunities so that they are encouraged to stay in school, to learn a new skill and to pursue a field of study that interests them most. Once again I would like to thank the Premier and the minister for this wonderful investment in our youth.

DRESS THE PART

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today in recognition of a great event that I attended last week in Oshawa called Dress the Part, a half-day workshop targeted to low-income women looking to re-enter the workforce. The event, organized by Avocation, a non-profit organization that helps Durham residents overcome barriers to employment, provided a forum to connect job-seeking women with image professionals, makeup artists and free, gently used business clothing donated by local businesses and residents of our community.

1340

Women attending Dress the Part had the opportunity to listen to many different information sessions throughout the morning, such as the Power of Women and Dress Right 4 Your Body Type, each dealing with the aspects of readying themselves for the task of searching for a job. After the various presentations, women then received one-on-one consultation sessions with image professionals.

Equipping women with the tools they need to create the image they want is vital to bolstering the most important quality of all when seeking employment, which is, of course, a healthy level of self-confidence. As the founder and executive director of Avocation, Faelyne Templer, stated at the event, "We all know that when we look good, we feel good, and are therefore more confident to achieve the goals we want." She also noted how difficult it can be to put together a wardrobe on a budget.

Re-entering the workforce takes courage and persistence, and I would like to take this opportunity to applaud all the women in Durham region and across this province who are currently undertaking this task. I would also like to thank Ms. Templer and all those involved with Avocation for organizing such an important event.

HIV/AIDS IN AFRICA

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I rise in the House today to bring your attention to a project that is being undertaken by students from an interdisciplinary class at M.M. Robinson High School in Burlington. Why Burlington? These fine young people are working exceptionally hard to raise awareness of the crisis created by HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Recently, we celebrated World AIDS Day, and this past summer the 16th International AIDS Conference took place right here in Toronto. While watching some of the conference on TV, let me tell you what I remember most about this conference that was important to me. It wasn't the celebrities and it wasn't even the researchers, although I support both; it was the grandmothers from Africa and their stories that I will always remember and keep close to my heart.

Most of us cannot imagine what it's like to raise your children and helplessly watch them die; to see your grandchildren orphaned because of a disease out of control unnecessarily and to see these children stigmatized because of the disease—in some cases no grandparents are available, so as young as 11-year-olds are raising families the best they can; to know that the spread of AIDS/HIV in Africa threatens to wipe out an entire generation of children.

But, Speaker, I don't need to tell you or the members of this House about this epidemic and the devastation that it leaves behind. So with this sad story, let's all hear the story of hope. One of these stories is the class from MMR. They have taken up the cause to raise awareness of the devastation taking place in Africa, many children dying in Africa, those younger than themselves. These students are a reminder and set a wonderful example for all of us. Their actions will make a difference. We thank them.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I rise to speak about an investment that the McGuinty government is making in Ontario. It will be an important boost in the areas of health and health care services for all Ontarians.

Unlike the previous government that forced years of downloading onto the municipalities, the McGuinty government has announced that it is investing \$300 million between 2006 and 2008 in order to move towards a 50-50 sharing cost for land ambulance services.

What does this mean? It means that finally municipalities will have access to the resources and the funding that they need. It means an additional \$50 million in investments in 2006.

The need to safeguard the health of Ontarians is a number one priority for this government. As a result we have made our Ontario municipal partnership fund flexible enough to respond to the needs of local community programs, which are necessary to the overall health of the community. While other parties cut valuable

resources and funding to health care services, this government has been looking for new ways to not only help cash-strapped municipalities but to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the services they require and they deserve.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): I'm quite aware that this is the time of year when Santa reviews whether we've been naughty or nice. I know that statement probably sends shivers through my colleagues across the floor, but I also think that at this time of year it's time to quickly review the great things that are happening in rural Ontario because of the McGuinty government.

We all know that the health of our loved ones is perhaps the most important thing in our society. As a result, health investments have been a priority for this government. We are creating 150 new family health teams, with more than half being put in underserved communities that are in need of health care professionals.

We also know the importance of financial security around this time of year. While the previous government slashed \$80 million from the agricultural budget, the McGuinty government has provided \$910 million over the past three years for farm income stabilization and support programs, including \$125 million announced last spring and \$110 million announced at this year's international plowing match.

We also recognize that our rural community deserves valuable economic supports. That is why we've invested \$22.9 million into our rural communities through the rural economic development program.

I am proud of my constituents, and it's important to recognize that these individuals and others like them in the rural sector have provided many of the goods and services that we enjoy in this holiday season. I want to thank them again and remind them that the McGuinty government is on their side.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (BY-LAWS RE ABSENTEE LANDLORDS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (RÈGLEMENTS MUNICIPAUX CONCERNANT LES LOCATEURS ABSENTS)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 176, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 /
Projet de loi 176, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités.

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. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): This bill amends the Municipal Act to allow municipalities to put in place bylaws to regulate absentee landlords within their jurisdiction. It gives them the authority to set up a system to track absentee landlords and to require deposits or bonds for property upkeep.

This bill arises out of an ongoing problem in my riding and many downtown ridings with crack houses. This will give cities the authority to deal with them far more vigorously than they have in the past.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot items 69 and 70 be waived.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): 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 Monday, December 18, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Ms. Wynne has moved government notice of motion number 279. 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 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: Ms. Wynne has moved government notice of motion number 279. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Dunlop, Garfield	Parsons, Ernie
Arthurs, Wayne	Elliott, Christine	Patten, Richard
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Barrett, Toby	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Hardeman, Ernie	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim

Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	
Duncan, Dwight	Munro, Julia	

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Martel, Shelley	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 55; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

DEFERRED VOTES

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l'Ontario.

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

The division bells rang from 1357 to 1402.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Balkissoon, Bas	Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kwinter, Monte	Runciman, Robert W.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Brotten, Laurel C.	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McGuinty, Dalton	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Oraziotti, David	
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Yakubuski, John
Elliott, Christine	Prue, Michael	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 58; the nays are 11.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'd ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: This bill is referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Under standing order 97(d), I'd like to bring to your attention overdue order paper questions 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240 and 241 in the name of the member for Leeds–Grenville and 254, 255, 256, 257 and 258 in the name of the member for Simcoe North. Interim answers were tabled on November 21; they reported they would provide a full answer in the neighbourhood of December 15, 2006, which we think is an avoidance mechanism.

For order paper questions 260 and 261 in the name of the member for Leeds–Grenville, again we had an interim answer indicating that the full answer would be available last week. For question 287 in the name of the member for Oxford and question 309 in the name of the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock—these are all clear violations of the standing order.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Ministers, I want to remind you that you are required, under standing order 38(i), to file a response to a petition within 24 sitting days of its presentation. Your responses are now overdue. I would ask you to give the House some indication as to when the response will take place. Chief government whip?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): They will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

VISITOR

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to welcome to the Legislative Assembly, in the members' east gallery, visiting from Thunder Bay, my son Dustin Mauro.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): To the Premier: As the Premier is aware, on December 5, 2006, the Auditor General stated in his report that the data contained in the McGuinty Liberals' wait time website was—I'm quoting—"misleading" and needed—again quoting—to be "taken with a grain of salt."

At the same time, Advertising Standards Canada found that the recent taxpayer-funded \$2-million ads claiming that people could reduce their wait times by calling a number or visiting a website—ads that were based on data found by the Auditor General to be "misleading"—raised expectations that remained unsatisfied, made inaccurate claims and omitted relevant information, contrary to the code.

Premier, given this set of facts, are you prepared to stand in your place and admit that the ads were wrong and apologize for this misuse of taxpayers' dollars in an obvious bid to buy votes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): A few facts I think would be helpful in this regard: First of all, the ad that ran on TV was approved by the Auditor General. The member opposite will know that we have now in place a new regime which requires that the taxpayer dollars that are going to be used to advertise government policies—those ads have to first be subjected to the review of the Auditor General. He did, in fact, review that ad and he did, in fact, approve it.

Secondly, it doesn't matter how you slice it or dice it: Wait times in the province of Ontario are coming down. Whether you look at median times, average times or 90th-percentile times, wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario.

We have embarked upon something that is not without some challenges—there's no doubt about that—but we are proud to be pioneers in this regard. We're collecting information that was never collected before. We're making it public for the very first time, and we're pleased and proud to be able to do that to better inform the people of Ontario.

1410

Mr. Runciman: As the Premier well knows, the Auditor General looks at the issue of partisanship. The advertising council exists to ensure truth, honesty, fairness and accuracy in advertising. They found that you violated sections 1(a) and (b) of the Canadian code of advertising standards with your ads on wait times. They deal with accuracy and clarity. Section 1(a) says, "Advertisements must not contain inaccurate or deceptive claims ... either direct or implied." Section 1(b) says, "Advertisements must not omit relevant information in a manner that, in the result, is deceptive." Those are the clauses your ads were found to violate.

Will the Premier admit today that he was wrong to run the ads, will he apologize to the taxpayers, and will he commit to have the Ontario Liberal Party repay the \$2 million spent on these ads to the public treasury? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's becoming apparent, as we pioneer in this area and embark on a journey which all other governments were afraid to embark upon, that from time to time you'll run into conflicting opinions from various experts. The Auditor General said that this was a good ad; he gave it the thumbs-up and so we ran with it.

Now we hear from another body that they take issue with that.

We are also relying on the medical experts who put forward information and presented it in a very specific way on our wait times website, which is a very popular website; in fact, we've had more than 2.1 million hits on that website. The Auditor General takes issue with the way in which that information is being presented, even though it was approved by medical experts. So what we've done is asked former Senator Kirby to take a look at it, to give us his best advice as to how we reconcile the conflicting opinions we're getting from the Auditor General and our medical experts. But our intention remains the same: to collect this information and to present it in the very best way possible to Ontarians.

Mr. Runciman: This is an old shell game the Premier likes to play: He's comparing apples and oranges. The Auditor General looks at a different set of standards. We've pointed that out, and the Premier is refusing to take this seriously.

Premier, may I remind you that the advertising council includes approximately 170 leading advertisers, advertising agencies, media organizations and suppliers to the advertising sector? Through their membership, they communicate their commitment to responsible advertising. You should take their finding seriously, not only because they are serious but because I have here a list of the members of the council and one of those members is the government of Ontario.

The ads were found to be in violation of the Canadian code of advertising standards. They made inaccurate claims. They omitted relevant information.

You should apologize. The Ontario Liberal Party should repay \$2 million to the taxpayers and pay for public retractions of the ads. Will you commit to those three things today?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: No, I won't. The ad was approved by the Auditor General. The ad said that there are more nurses; in fact, we're now funding 4,300 more full-time positions. The ad said that there were more doctors, and there are, because we've increased medical school spaces by 23%; there are 104 new spaces. There are 750 new international graduates working in Ontario and 470 more in assessment. There are more MRI technologists. Angiography waits are down by 39%. Angioplasty waits are down by 18%. Cataract surgeries are down by 27.7% in terms of wait times. Hip replacement wait times are down 20%; knee replacements, 20%; MRIs, 13%; and CT scans, 2.5%.

Again, we are doing something that's never been done before. It's not easy, and we will work our way through it. We're collecting information. We're making it available to the public. We'll work with all the experts involved to make sure we do it in the best way possible.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. The occupation of the Douglas

Creek Estates in Caledonia is now in its 294th day. Tensions and frustrations on both sides of this dispute remain high. There was an ill-advised protest this past weekend that those of us on both sides of this House tried to discourage. And then came reports that someone broke into and vandalized the home of a family whose house backs onto the disputed land. Residents are worried that these tensions will go on indefinitely. Last week, a protest spokesperson noted, "We are here indefinitely. We are here to stay."

The province has given the occupiers the green light to remain throughout the winter, a situation that is causing obvious tensions that put the aboriginal protesters and nearby residents at ongoing risk of inflammatory incidents. Premier, has the government at least asked the native protesters if they would, as a goodwill gesture, leave the occupied site while negotiations continue, or will you completely abandon your principle that the protest should not continue throughout the winter?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Around the main table of negotiations that the province set up, at which the federal government now has the lead role, from the very beginning it was made clear by the government of Ontario and the federal government that the object of the negotiations was not only to settle the outstanding disputes in the area but also to find an end to the occupation. That is one of the main goals of the main table. There is a side table, a technical table, that works on issues directly related to the Douglas Creek Estates property, and that is one of the main goals of this government: to end that occupation.

Mr. Miller: On June 16, 2006, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing promised compensation for homeowners. These are people caught in the middle of the dispute who are having to pay a huge price for the failure of the government to keep its word. The press release, which I have here, says, "The McGuinty government is providing emergency financial assistance to residents in Caledonia directly affected by the continuing blockade." Six months and two days later, the homeowners have seen no compensation. Why is the Premier breaking this important promise to the people of Caledonia?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would say to the member that we are continuing to work, and in fact Mr. Gerretsen's staff is working with residents in Caledonia and other representative groups in Caledonia to make sure that the package we have promised, when delivered, is exactly the right package for the people in need. We continue to work with those people to discuss what their concerns are and what expenses they have incurred, to make sure we get the compensation package exactly right so that it fits the need of the people there.

Mr. Miller: That the Premier refuses to answer this simple and direct question is very telling. We have a

situation in Caledonia that has seen innocent people caught in the middle, innocent people who are frightened for their safety and who have seen their property values dropping. We have a situation where the government of Ontario hastily moved to buy the disputed land, compensated businesses and promised to compensate homeowners. We have a situation where the McGuinty Liberals claim that all is well in Caledonia, but that characterization doesn't match up with the reality experienced by residents on a daily basis.

Six months ago, Dalton McGuinty promised to compensate homeowners. Six months have passed and nothing has happened. We are a week away from Christmas. Will the Premier keep his promise before Christmas?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The government is going to keep its promise. As I have said, officials from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have been working with the homeowners and others in the community to make sure that we do get it right. We want to make sure that, when announced, the package is well accepted by the people who have that need.

I would say to the member that nobody has ever said everything is just well in Caledonia. What we have said is that, as we have been able to lower the temperature since the beginning of that occupation, we are now focused at the negotiating table and not on the occupation. But what happens from time to time is that, when we get these outside influences, incidents arise again. But what we've done all along is to focus on negotiation. Of course, when other things happen, the police are doing their proper job.

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: last week, I listened intently when you said that you were going to do something to ensure that Hydro consumers were respected. That was last week. This week, we find out from the Globe and Mail that under the McGuinty government, the costs associated with the operation of Ontario's hydroelectricity agencies have soared. Operation, maintenance and administration costs under the McGuinty government have increased by \$1.2 billion, and of course Hydro executive pay has skyrocketed.

My question is this: Premier, how does the McGuinty government justify this \$1.2-billion increase in operating costs and the skyrocketing salaries of Hydro executives?

1420

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): There is no question that the undertakings in 1998 around the breakup of the old Ontario Hydro have not come to pass. We have been delighted to apply the auditor to Hydro One and OPG as well as other agencies of the government. The kinds of findings that have come about as a result of the auditor's most recent report have led to, I think, a rather quick response.

It is always in the interests of ratepayers to look at costs. To that end, we will continue to work with the boards of all the affected agencies to ensure that costs are managed in as effective a manner as is possible.

Mr. Hampton: It didn't surprise me that the Premier doesn't want to answer this question, because this leads back to him. The fact is, when most ordinary Ontarians look at their hydro bill, it has now doubled, and there are literally tens of thousands of workers in the province who know that their job has been destroyed as a result of skyrocketing electricity rates. Meanwhile, the Premier has created yet another hydroelectricity agency, the Ontario Power Authority, and he has put his former Bay Street bag man, Mr. Jan Carr, in charge, giving him a \$600,000-plus salary. But it's even worse than that, because at the Ontario Power Authority the operating costs under the McGuinty government have quadrupled, exceeding all forecasts.

My question to the Premier: Since he wanted to speak about this last week, can he tell hard-pressed hydro consumers across the province: What exactly is the McGuinty government's plan to ensure that hydro consumers are respected?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, the first step to respect is to point out that the price of electricity is lower today than it was when we took office, so let's not forget that.

The second thing to point out is that, prior to the creation of the power authority, there was nobody in Ontario doing power planning. I read the comments of the old Hydro executive in the Globe and Mail about how few people they did it with. Remember Darlington?

Planning is an important function of the power authority. Its budget has been appropriately used this year. The work it has undertaken is important to the future of our electricity system and important to the people of Ontario. Their work will continue, their costs will be managed appropriately, but the work must go on, the planning must begin. We need a cleaner, greener, more reliable supply of electricity. This government is committed to that.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government says that hydro rates are coming down. I invite any member of the McGuinty government to go to the Abitibi Mission mill in Thunder Bay, where they were just told that workers there have three weeks of downtime. Why? Because the costs of producing in Ontario are too high. And the principal cost? Hydro rates.

Here is the real issue, though. The Premier likes to give speeches about respecting hydro consumers, but the McGuinty government, it is clear, doesn't have a plan to respect hydro consumers. The McGuinty government has presided over the explosion in salaries and the explosion in operating costs.

I say to the Premier, if you really want to respect hydro consumers, if you really want to get to the bottom of what is going on, what I suggest we need is a public inquiry to look at the explosion in Hydro executive salaries and to look at where the increase of \$1.2 billion in operating costs went. Premier, will the McGuinty gov-

ernment take the issue of hydro costs seriously and call a public inquiry so we can get to the bottom of the problem instead of hearing more speeches from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government takes hydro costs very seriously. That's why the steps we've taken have been undertaken.

The member referred to the power authority's increase in budget. I do think the public needs to know that 73% of that new funding was allocated to conservation, something that that member wouldn't have a lot of understanding or sympathy for, because they cancelled all conservation programs when they were the government.

The reason the McGuinty government asked the Provincial Auditor to look at these organizations is to shine a light on how they are managed. That's why we applied freedom of information; that's why we applied salary disclosure. The steps this government has taken are the appropriate steps. Over time, they will lead to greater confidence in the sector and in members of that sector.

We remain committed to and are delivering more affordable, greener, and more reliable electricity to the people of Ontario today and well into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: Premier, if you attacked Hydro fat cats and executive pay salaries over there with the same tenacity with which you attack a 31% pay increase for yourself, greed at Hydro One, OPG and OPA would be ancient history. That's what people across Ontario can't understand. They see Hydro executive salaries skyrocketing, they hear the Premier give speeches, but nothing gets done.

My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government have the time and energy to spend literally a week and a half here forcing through a 31% pay increase for itself when you don't seem to have any time or energy to address the skyrocketing costs and the skyrocketing salaries in the hydro system under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I think the leader of the NDP knows where I stand on this issue. He knows that I'll be voting in favour of this bill and that I will be accepting the increase that comes with it.

I want to draw his attention to Bill 173. If you take a look at the explanatory notes, it specifically says, I say to my friend opposite, that this bill "enables a current member to choose to be bound by the current provisions that govern his or her annual salary." It says, "Notice of the member's choice must be given to the Speaker within 60 days after the bill receives royal assent, and the notice is permanent and irrevocable."

That provision is in there to allow for members who choose to object on principle to avail themselves of that specific election. There's only one way for anybody to oppose this bill on principle—it's irrevocable, it is un-

equivocal—and to make it permanent, and that is to opt out. I say to Mr. Hampton, will you opt out of this bill?

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier, if you showed half the energy—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will come to order. I won't warn her again.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier, if you showed half the energy in addressing the skyrocketing salaries that have happened in the hydroelectricity system under the McGuinty government, if you showed half the energy and the tenacity in dealing with the \$1.2-billion increase in hydro operating costs, maybe all those ordinary people out there who are having trouble paying the hydro bill would understand why you want to increase MPP salaries. But when they can't pay the hydro bill and when many of them live on salaries of less than \$31,000 a year, they take exception to your desire to increase the salary by—

The Speaker: The question's been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP gives every impression that he remains adamantly opposed to the consequences of this bill. I assume he's going to vote against it, but I have every reason to believe that he will not avail himself of the option here. There's only one way to unequivocally, irrevocably, permanently and verifiably not take the pay hike and that is to say that he's going to sign on to that option. I think what the people of Ontario want to know is, now that we're all being clear and straightforward—I'm going to take the raise and I'm going to vote for it. Mr. Hampton, I believe, is going to vote against the bill and take it anyway, unless he assures this House now that he will in fact opt out.

1430

Mr. Hampton: Premier McGuinty is wrong again. Premier, I'm going to give any increase that might come to me to charities. What are you going to do with yours, Premier—put it in your pocket?

I want to ask about Kelvin Shmeichel, who runs—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Order. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will come to order. I will not warn her again. The Minister of Natural Resources. I won't warn him again.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, my question is about Kelvin Shmeichel. He runs one of the two community stores in the community of Pickle Lake. The transmission system which delivers electricity to his community is so unreliable that he's lost \$100,000 from his business, and he's afraid even to make any insurance claims. He sees the skyrocketing salaries at Hydro One. He sees the skyrocketing operating costs; he pays for them every month on his hydro bill. What he wants to know from you is, with the skyrocketing hydro bill, the skyrocketing

salaries at Hydro One and OPG, why isn't the delivery of electricity to his store any better under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, the leader of the NDP gives the impression that he remains adamantly opposed. He tells us that he might do something vis-à-vis charities; of what duration, we have no understanding whatsoever. There's only one clear way to oppose this bill. There's only one way to do it that is verifiable, that is permanent, that is irrevocable and that is verifiable, and that's to avail yourself of the option. So I'd ask Mr. Hampton on behalf of the people of Ontario, since he's so adamantly opposed to this pay increase: Will he in fact reject it now and forever?

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I guess we're going to get an annual filing from the leader of the NDP.

To the Premier: Premier, I want to call your attention to the issue of employers becoming liable to pay for the so-called health tax. The December 16 Toronto Sun reported the Toronto Transit Commission will have to retroactively pay \$12 million for its employees' health tax for the past two years. The TTC chair estimates that taxpayers will have to shell out between \$5 million and \$6 million annually going forward just for this specific situation.

Premier, do you have any idea how many more cases like the TTC's there are in Ontario and what the total cost to taxpayers could be?

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

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I guess the first thing to say to my friend is that there are some 60 cases that were before arbitrators, and in 51 of those cases, the ruling of the arbitrator was of the same view as we were when we introduced the Ontario health premium, and that is that the responsibility to pay the premium lies with individual taxpayers.

At the same time, I want to say to you that we understand that it is the responsibility of arbitrators to interpret collective agreements, and obviously we would not interfere with those interpretations. The final thing is to say that we are aware of the judgment of the Ontario Court of Appeal and we are going to be reviewing that judgment very carefully.

Mr. Runciman: Once the precedent is set, I think you should be reviewing it very closely. As we told you back in 2004, the total cost could be in the neighbourhood of \$500 million. That's \$500 million that won't be available for hospitals, long-term-care facilities or classrooms.

On October 27, 2004, the Premier told the assembly that it has always been your government's intention that taxpayers would pay this and not employers, and that remains your intention; you've just reiterated that. But the TTC case shows you've been caught red-handed,

some might say, after saying, "Nobody will have to pay the health tax twice." Taxpayers will now foot the bill again, likely through a TTC fare hike, a property tax increase or perhaps both.

Minister of Finance, you've had two years to correct this. You chose to do nothing. You could have avoided this if you'd kept your promise not to raise taxes. Can you give us some indication today: When will you keep your promise and not force employers to pay this illegal health tax?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The member himself puts on the floor the information that makes his case so weak. He said a couple of years ago that this could cost the taxpayers some \$500 million. The fact is, as a result of matters being brought under collective agreements before arbitrators, of the 60 cases before arbitrators, 51 of those cases have confirmed the view of the government. We were waiting, as I said in this House several months ago, for the deliberation of the Court of Appeal on this matter. That decision has now been rendered and we are studying that decision very carefully.

I reiterate: When we introduced the bill, after we introduced the bill and today, the liability for the Ontario health premium is an individual liability, not an employer liability.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): The question is to the Minister of Education. Last week, the trustees of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board ended the charade surrounding your power grab at their school board. The local trustees voted unanimously not to participate in your provincially appointed management team and called on you to change the title of your agent from "chair of the co-management team" to "supervisor." Will you admit that your so-called co-management chair is really the supervisor of a takeover team, one in a long line of takeover teams dating back to the Harris-Eves regime?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): First of all, I'd like to say that 71 of the 72 boards in Ontario have balanced their budget. It's a terrific record. I'm in a very good dialogue with the boards moving into next year.

My answer to the member opposite is no; I will not admit that there has been any failure in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board. What we're doing is we've got a gentleman, Norbert Hartmann, in place who is working with the trustees, willing to listen to the trustees and has been meeting with the trustees. He has been meeting with them and talking with them. The fact that the trustees at this point are not taking the offer of being part of the co-management team does not change the fact that we are open to conversation with them, we are collaborating with them, and that is why Norbert Hartmann is there doing the work in the way he is.

Mr. Marchese: If the minister was really interested in a co-management team, why did your appointee, Mr.

Hartmann, unilaterally impose a 10% reduction in spending with no consultation from the other members of the so-called co-management team? If the minister was really worried about prudent spending, she would stop wasting the \$1,500 a day that she's paying Mr. Hartmann and the almost \$140,000 that has been blown on advisers.

When will the minister return control of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to the duly elected trustees, provide the funding that is being denied and allow the local trustees to do the job they were elected to do?

1440

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I know that the member opposite was a school trustee at one point, but he has no idea of what it's like to be under supervision. When I was a school trustee with the Toronto board, I was under supervision under the previous government. There was no communication with us as trustees. There was no interest in hearing what we had to say. In fact, the trustee supervisor came in and locked doors between the staff and our offices. It was a shameless, shameless display of arrogance.

What we're doing in Dufferin-Peel Catholic is, we've put a person in place who is willing to talk and has been talking to school trustees and who is interested in what's going on in the community and what the issues are and are not. I am absolutely confident that Mr. Hartmann is going to be able to work with the trustees. I'm also confident that the new trustees who have been elected are going to be interested in working with him.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is for the Minister of Finance. As we near the end of this year, I know that Hamilton and municipalities across the province are beginning to plan their budgets for the year 2007. I think it's fair to say that with growing populations and many of the pressures they face, municipalities will be counting on the stable funding the province has provided in past years. I know that for many of them, including Hamilton, finding out how much funding will be received through the Ontario-municipal partnership fund is critical to their planning. Can you tell us when municipalities can expect to hear from you on 2007 OMPF funding allotments and if there will be anything different in this year's funding?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): As it turns out, it's a timely question because the letters are going out, as we speak, to municipalities concerning the Ontario-municipal partnership fund. More important than that, and even better news, is that we're providing this year some \$824 million to the partnership fund. That represents an 8% increase over last year and a 33% increase over what was being provided by the previous administration under a system that was chaotic, unfair and inequitable.

The very good news, because all politics is local, is that the city of Hamilton will be receiving an increase of some \$3 million for funding of almost \$36 million under the fund. Hamilton deserves it and we're proud to provide it.

Ms. Marsales: Thank you, Minister. We are very happy to hear that good news, and thank you for the update.

I know that Hamilton will be glad to know that the McGuinty government has listened to their concerns, particularly with respect to the burden of social program costs on the property tax base. Despite our own fiscal challenges, we have responded to the best of our ability to support our municipal partners. It's great news for Hamilton to see such an increase, but will this be true for all other municipalities in the province? Can you explain to us why some municipalities will be seeing more funding than others, and if any municipality will be seeing a decrease in the funding this year?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The first thing to point out is that no municipality will see a decrease in 2007. The reason some municipalities get more and some get less is that the new formula is designed to provide equitable funding, taking into consideration a wide variety of factors.

I would simply add that I am very proud of the work we have done with municipalities, particularly under the leadership of my colleague Mr. Gerretsen as Minister of Municipal Affairs. We are in the midst of a consultation process looking at a wide variety of financial issues between municipalities and the provincial government. But this program, the Ontario-municipal partnership fund, has been a really important new foundation between the provincial government and hundreds of municipalities around the province.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. As you know, a little more than a month ago I tabled a resolution on the Green Lane landfill deal, which incidentally is scheduled to close at some time this week. Allow me to refresh your memory about the content of the resolution. It asks the following—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. The Minister of Labour will come to order.

Member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Miller: Allow me to refresh your memory about the content of the resolution. It asked for the following: proof that the region surrounding the Green Lane landfill is willing to take Toronto's garbage; a guarantee that the landfill will not operate beyond its current scheduled closing in 2018; and a call to the city of Toronto to take the necessary steps to reduce their waste so the city can stop shipping garbage to the London area by 2012. The resolution passed and received support from all parties.

Premier, could you tell this Legislature and the people of Ontario: In the month that has elapsed, who at the city

of Toronto have you contacted to ensure that the goals of this resolution are being met?

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to assure this Legislature that I very much value the input of the Legislature. All sides of the House had an opportunity to debate that resolution during private members' time. Unfortunately, the members opposite seem to want to play politics with a very serious and important issue to the community in London—and Southwold, in fact, where this landfill is located—who are working closely with the community around them and have done so for many, many years.

The role of the province is to undertake an environmental assessment, as we did; impose some very stringent standards and conditions, as we did; monitor the certificate of approval and, again, impose more stringent standards; and provide municipalities right across the province with the tools they need to be able to better manage their waste. Those are the active steps we take every single day at the Ministry of the Environment to ensure that our environment is protected.

Mr. Miller: Premier, one of your major promises to Ontario was that you would respect the role of MPPs and respect democracy. You also said that you would divert 60% of municipal garbage to recycling. One thing has now led to another, and the fact is, you've broken both of those promises. Despite the fact that you insist on continuing to break your promises to hard-working Ontarians, you have an obligation to act on the will of this Legislature.

When you were in opposition, you tabled a very similar resolution. You believed, or said you believed, that communities must be willing hosts to receive waste from other regions. Now, on the eve of the closing of this deal, you are saying to the people of Ontario that you don't believe in the notion of a willing host and that you aren't prepared to at least work with the city of Toronto for the sake of all parties concerned. You have a moral obligation that resolutions passed in this Legislature are acted upon. Will you follow up on the Green Lane resolution passed by the House on November 16?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I guess I find it passing strange that my friend is the one asking this question, because the municipality that he represents is one of the municipalities that currently send their waste to Green Lane.

My friends opposite have a history of failing to respect the role and importance of municipalities and the importance of those political leaders at a municipal level, who are the ones responsible to manage municipal solid waste. I would remind my friend that Mayor Miller has always indicated that he will work closely with the community of Southwold and that the mayor of the township of Southwold, in correspondence dated November 3, 2006, has said that on behalf of his municipality, he welcomes the initiatives and looks forward to initial meetings and discussions with the city of Toronto.

So, municipal leaders right across this province: We respect them. They're working collaboratively together. The community of Southwold and the city of Toronto are currently in discussions and negotiations, and they will undertake that. If they need—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Last week the Health for Life Medical Centre opened in Kingston. It's offering comprehensive health care to people over the age of 50. The first-year membership fee is \$2,500, and it's \$2,000 each year after that. In addition to the non-insured wellness services, the website says, "Any medically necessary medical care, exams, investigations and referrals can be performed at or through the centre as needed, or referred to the appropriate medical specialist. This medically necessary care is taken care of through the Ontario health insurance plan."

Minister, this sounds like "pay your way to the front of the line" health care to me. When are you going to put a stop to it?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To my honourable friend, this is an issue that we take seriously. It would have been great if the NDP had taken it seriously when we had a bill before the House called the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, which actually gave us very strong penalties and sanctions associated with exactly this kind of action.

The ministry is conducting an investigation into the operation of a clinic in Kingston, and we do so on this very, very simple and sound principle: We will not stand by and tolerate a circumstance where an Ontarian is asked or obliged to pay a fee in advance of receiving an OHIP-funded service. The penalties associated with this are strong. They are embedded in the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act. Have no doubt whatsoever that, in a similar way as we applied it to the Copeman model, we will be following this and taking action as is appropriate. And as I said, there's an investigation under way.

1450

Ms. Martel: Bill 8 is working so well that this clinic is up and running. The Cleveland Clinic in Toronto, which also says you can get diagnostic services if you pay a fee, is still in operation and has been all fall. So I say to the minister, if you're going to do something, I'd sure like to know when. For your \$2,500 membership fee, the website also says, "... should you require a family physician, Dr. Kilpatrick can become your family physician. Dr. Kilpatrick is willing to make house calls as necessary." Further, if you want more services from the allied health professionals who work at the centre, nurses included, then the centre "will make arrangements for such services through our staff at the centre and will bill you for the services provided."

Minister, seniors in Kingston want to know that they'll have access to health care in their municipality even if they don't have \$2,500 a year to pay for it. When are you going to stop this "pay your way to the front of the line" operation?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The seniors that the honourable member mentions in Kingston know the honourable member well, because they know that she was more involved than just about anybody else in helping to create the current challenges that they have related to access. But I think our government's commitment to the people of Kingston can be found in the emergence of two very large family health teams, additional funding for the community health centre and, indeed, an additional satellite of a community health centre, all of which are expanding access to universally accessible services in the Kingston community.

As I said on the earlier issue, we will use those powers in the bill that the honourable member voted against in order to be able to bring to heel any organization that we are able to substantiate a claim about that they are acting that way. I remind all members in this House that research for the honourable member passes with a cursory view of a website. Instead, we think it's important to be on-site and to seek to address that. That's why an investigation is under way.

EDUCATION

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Education. As the minister is well aware, one of the major priorities of our government has been improving the quality of education for our children and students in this province. We're lowering class sizes in the primary grades, we're increasing graduation rates for those in high school, and we're improving student achievement for all students while maintaining peace and stability. We have the support of parents, teachers and our education partners, and even have support on the primary class size initiative from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Tory, who said in a CP24 interview back in September that he thinks it's "a good initiative."

We can speak of general success in education throughout the province, but the citizens of my constituency want to know how it's impacting our community. Can the minister please inform my constituents how our priorities are making a difference for students in Kitchener Centre?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his advocacy. I want to talk about what's going on in primary class size reduction in the Waterloo region board and the Waterloo Catholic board. When we came to office in 2003, 33% of students in kindergarten to grade 3 were in classes of 20 or fewer. Last year, 50% of those students were sitting in classes of 20 or fewer. In the Waterloo Catholic board, when we came to office, only 27% of kindergarten to grade 3 students were in classes of 20 or fewer. Now, 58% of those students are sitting in

classes—so it's not surprising that the members opposite would agree with this initiative, because we know it is good for students.

In the two boards combined, there are 274 more teachers. Some of those are for primary class size. Some of those are art teachers. Some of those are music teachers. It's been a good year for education in Kitchener.

Mr. Milloy: One of the major accomplishments of the McGuinty government this session is to pass Bill 52, learning to 18, designed to help us meet our priority to help more students graduate. Students will now be required to stay in school until they're the age of 18 or until graduation, and we're also providing students with more choice to help them on their path to success. The bill allows us to expand co-operative programs, develop dual-credit courses, introduce more high-skills majors and engage in a deeper discussion around equivalent learning.

Recently, the minister came to my riding of Kitchener Centre to highlight three student success lighthouse projects at Forest Heights high school aimed to help struggling students to graduate through increased support, extra guidance and unique learning opportunities. I'd like to ask the minister if she can tell this House how programs such as the ones at Forest Heights are helping high school students in Ontario.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: It was really a pleasure to visit with the teachers and the students at Forest Heights Collegiate a couple of weeks ago.

There are three lighthouse projects at Forest Heights Collegiate, and there are 400 students participating in these three programs. There's the reintegrating-engaging-connecting program, which gives students a space where they can get connected back to the school and reclaim some credits. The new horizons immigrant youth program focuses on language and skill development, and the career explorations and integrated services model program gives co-op education students an opportunity to explore other options.

I want to talk about Zeljka Stanivuk. Zeljka is a student in the career explorations and integrated services program, the third one. She nearly dropped out of school. She credits the school's integration worker, Tanya Dale, for helping her to re-engage in learning. She says, "She's the type of person that you simply can't disrespect. Little by little she learned about me. She was the one I could turn to."

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, you once said that the Ontario Power Authority was going to be a virtual agency with very few employees, maybe 10 to 15. We read on the weekend from Karen Howlett of the Globe and Mail that the budget of this agency has gone from \$14.9 million to \$31 million and next year will go to \$57.4 million. All of this goes directly to the rate base that the people of this province have to pay when

they're paying their hydro bills. This agency is somewhat of an insulative agency to protect you from your flip-flops and your own incompetence when articulating energy policy in the province of Ontario, Minister. I'm asking the minister: How can you justify this kind of increase when the head of this authority is paid \$638,000 and is a personal friend of the Premier? It's only going to get bigger, it looks like. How do you justify this to the people of Ontario? Tell us, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): When the previous government broke up the old Ontario Hydro and created five successor organizations, they forgot one thing: forward planning. It's unfortunate that they did, because the electricity supply in Ontario actually decreased under the previous government's administration while demand for electricity went up. It left us in an untenable position, when we came to office, in terms of supplying adequate amounts of electricity.

The OPA was the subject of a long debate in this House. It was established. It has acted on a number of directives, the most important of which so far have been conservation initiatives which account for 73% of this year's budget increase. This planning authority, this planning body, is extremely important to the future of Ontario and to the future of our electricity supply.

Mr. Yakubuski: Minister, yes, this House by your majority did create the Ontario Power Authority. It was your doing, you created it, and you're also the one who had to approve these kinds of unbelievable increases in its budget. That has to go through your office, Minister. In an era when we're seeing the CEO of Hydro One out the door with a \$3-million severance because of questionable behaviour with regard to his spending on his secretary's credit cards, because of the size of that bureaucracy, you want to create another one: \$57.4 million directly to the rate base on your hand, Mr. Minister. You're allowing this kind of spending on something that is basically insulating you to protect you from the real mess that you've created in the Ministry of Energy.

Minister, how can you justify these kinds of increases in an agency that is simply your own creation, your creation to protect you? I believe that \$57.4 million is a bit expensive.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It is essential that we have the ability to plan Ontario's energy future. The member will recall that this year we did the integrated power system plan. Seventy-three per cent of that increase has gone to new conservation initiatives. We started at zero two years ago. There has been an increase in the last two years; there's no question. I expect that increase to moderate now that these things are up and running.

I would remind the member opposite that when his leader was asked what they would do with the power authority—would they get rid of it? What would they get rid of?—he said he didn't know. You need a planning authority in this province, you need to fund it properly, and you need to make sure we have a plan and that we have adequate, reliable and affordable electricity going into the future. That's what Ontarians need, that's what

Ontarians want, and that's what this government is delivering.

1500

PAPER MILL

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins—James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you'll know that last Friday there was a protest in the town of Iroquois Falls in regard to a meeting the town of Iroquois Falls had with the company directors from Abitibi. The people there in the community are worried that once you allow the company to sever off those dams away from the company, the company will therefore be in a better position to make money from selling its hydro through those hydro dams to the grid than from providing cheap power to the paper mill in order to be able to keep that mill running.

The question that the community wants me to ask you is a very simple one: Will you stand today in this House and tell Abitibi that the public hydro dams must provide Iroquois Falls mills with electricity at cost for the duration of those leases?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Mr. Speaker, you know—and he's my friend, the member across the way. We work together on many issues, and he knows that the government of Ontario has neither the power nor the authority to stop such a business transition within a company operating in this country. You're making this an issue as if the government has the ability to step in and have any influence. This company is reorganizing itself. Some people don't like what they're doing, some people support it, but the government has neither the power nor the authority to affect it. There's no permission they need to apply for, so I don't know why you're asking the question.

Mr. Bisson: Minister, I'm asking the question for a simple reason: because there's something called a water-power lease agreement that the province of Ontario has signed with Abitibi, and if you read the lease agreement, it says, "The minister may terminate the lease with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, if he deems the termination to be in the public interest." So you do have the authority under the power lease agreement. Those power dams were built and licensed in order to produce electricity for those mills, not for the purpose of selling electricity to the grid, thus putting those mills out of commission when the electricity prices are going up.

You've seen the story across the north. We have paper mill after paper mill that has been in difficulty. We've had sawmills that have closed down—we've had Smooth Rock Falls go down altogether—and one of the big issues is electricity costs.

The community is asking you, as their local member and as a minister of the crown, to be their champion. Will you do what is right and will you make sure that Abitibi does not use the electricity from those power dams for

anything other than what they were intended for; that is, to deliver electricity to the mills in Iroquois Falls?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Abitibi wants to make itself more profitable so it can sustain these paper mills and jobs in Ontario. I obviously take a very particular interest in this mill. This mill is in my backyard, and we want to see those jobs staying in Iroquois Falls.

They are a strong company. They are strengthening themselves by doing this. They want to increase their revenues in order to keep sustainable, to sustain those jobs and keep our town sustainable. That's what they are doing, and anything the companies can do to get through this rough period they are having, that many have described as a perfect storm of influences that have really impacted the paper industry, makes the company stronger, makes the jobs sustainable and therefore makes our communities stronger.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, last week we passed the Fair Access to Regulations Professions Act, 2006. It received and passed third reading. As Debbie Douglas from OCASI stated this morning, "It is a decisive step forward in recognizing the skills and expertise of the many internationally trained individuals that come to Ontario."

Minister, I also have a letter here from the Islamic Foundation of Toronto, and it's signed off by Mr. S. Zain Khan, office of the president:

"I'm writing to you not only on behalf of the Muslim community of the GTA but immigrants in general at the passing of Bill 124, a progressive step of mammoth proportions. We salute you and herald the news as a great event in our history as new immigrants."

Minister, now that Bill 124 has been voted on and passed in the Legislature, what does this mean and how will it help us break down the barriers faced by our newcomers?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member from Mississauga East for his question. It's been very inspirational to see the amazing public support for this groundbreaking legislation, the first of its kind in Ontario and Canada, which for the first time has oversight over 34 regulatory bodies—unprecedented.

The positive thing is that now we are moving quickly as a government. This morning we opened up the first-ever access centre for the internationally trained, in partnership with the Minister of Health. It'll be a mentorship centre, an internship centre and a resource centre for the internationally trained to get the help they need to succeed. For too long, too many people have talked about helping newcomers, and they've delayed and navel-gazed. Now we are taking action to help newcomers become a brain gain for this great province and no longer a brain drain.

Mr. Fonseca: Minister, I couldn't be more delighted. I know that many people in my riding of Mississauga East have much hope. You've visited the riding. You've been throughout this province. You've talked to all the many regulated professions and those that are waiting to become part of the regulated professions.

Now that Bill 124 has passed in the Legislature, it is so important to start on the implementation of what is proposed. Internationally trained individuals have been waiting for too long, as you said, Minister. The barriers must be broken down now.

I have a quote here from Madina Wasuge, the executive director of Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion. She says, "This bill represents one of the boldest attempts by a provincial government to address the inequities that confront newcomers."

Minister, I commend you and Minister of Health George Smitherman on the official opening of Global Experience Ontario and HealthForceOntario, a new access and resource centre for internationally trained individuals—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: These are very, very good days for newcomers to Ontario. We passed the groundbreaking Bill 124, and on Friday announced with Mr. Solberg that the federal money we've been waiting for for years—I know the Premier's very interested in this—the \$300 million over the next two years, is flowing into community groups like SISO in Hamilton. All the groups across Ontario are getting the money they deserve for job placement, for language training, for settlement services. They've never had this money. There's been a freeze for decades—\$300 million over the next two years coming in to help new immigrants.

We opened the access centre up. Bill 124 is coming. Finally, newcomers are getting the respect and investment they've been waiting for. It's about time.

PETITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly and is present in some form in 25% to 33% of seniors over the age of 75. AMD has two forms: the more common 'dry' type and the 'wet' type. Although the wet type occurs in only 15% of AMD patients, these patients account for 90% of the legal blindness that occurs with AMD. The wet type is further subdivided into classic and occult subtypes, based on the appearance of the AMD on special testing. Photodynamic therapy, a treatment where abnormal blood vessels are closed with a laser-activated

chemical, has been shown to slow the progression of vision loss in both subtypes of wet AMD;

“Whereas OHIP has not extended coverage for photodynamic therapy to the occult subtype of wet AMD, despite there being substantial clinical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of this treatment in patients with either form of wet AMD. Untreated, these patients can expect a progression in their visual loss, with central blindness as the end result;

“Whereas affected patients are in a position where a proven treatment is available to help preserve their vision, but this treatment can only be accessed at their own personal expense. Treatment costs are between \$12,500 and \$18,000 over an 18-month period. Many patients resign themselves to a continued worsening of their vision, as for them the treatment is financially unattainable. The resultant blindness in these patients manifests itself as costs to society in other forms, such as an increased need for home care, missed time from work for family members providing care, and an increased rate of injuries such as hip fractures that can be directly attributable to their poor vision.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of the occult subtype of macular degeneration with photodynamic therapy for all patients awaiting this service.”

I am pleased to sign my name to this petition.

1510

CENTENNIAL OF STANLEY CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas, on January 21st, 1907, the Kenora Thistles beat the Montreal Wanderers 8 to 6 to capture the Stanley Cup; and

“Whereas Kenora is the smallest community to have ever won the Stanley Cup;

“Whereas these Stanley Cup champions—Si Griffis, Eddie Giroux, Art Ross, Roxy Beaudro, Tom Hooper, Tommy Phillips, Billie McGimsie, Joe Hall, Russel Phillips and trainer J.A. Link—are remembered with pride by the people of Kenora; and

“Whereas the city of Kenora will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of this important accomplishment on January 21st with an NHL Oldtimers game; and

“Whereas the city of Kenora will be celebrating the centennial throughout the year;

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

“We invite every member of the Legislature and every Ontarian to make your vacation destination Kenora, on beautiful Lake of the Woods, and witness the breathtaking scenery of northwestern Ontario, witness the hospitality of the people, witness the aboriginal culture and share the pride as Stanley Cup champions.”

This has been signed by several residents of northwestern Ontario; I affix my signature as well.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that I’m going to read on behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, to whom I send my greetings. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and their grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

“Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas we support Bill 8 as introduced by MPP Kim Craiton;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

I have affixed my signature to this petition and I’m going to ask page Or to carry it for me.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): “Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

“Whereas this site has been in operation for some 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

“Whereas the existing site is not in compliance with environmental regulations;

“Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow; and

“Whereas this landfill site is at the western gateway to our national capital; and

“Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

“Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area—Eli El-Chantiry and Peggy Feltmate—and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

“We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the Minister of the Environment does not approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead finds other waste management alternatives.”

I’ve signed it.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Northwestern Ontario Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder ... Diagnostic Clinic has been operating as a demonstration project since December 2004 with funds received through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

“Whereas this funding expires July 31, 2006;

“Whereas there is an enormous need in northwestern Ontario for regional access and accurate diagnosis of FASD;

“Whereas, without the northwestern Ontario FASD clinic, services are only accessible through a clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba, or St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, for which there is a four-year wait;

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

“Be it resolved that the provincial government commit to provide ongoing funding for the maintenance of the regional FASD diagnostic clinic, with two sites in northwestern Ontario.”

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature to it and send it to the table by way of page Ian.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas investing in our children’s futures through new literacy and numeracy initiatives will allow them to receive the education they deserve; and

“Whereas, through giving school boards access to innovative resources and providing individual attention to students, learning can become more specialized; and

“Whereas the new individual focus programs, such as the turnaround program, have been proven to dramatically see changes in the first phase of trials in 84% of schools that participated; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has developed a unique, made-in-Ontario strategy that will provide \$25 million to help increase student achievement;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the McGuinty government’s efforts in increasing funding for the Ontario-focused intervention partnership in order to aid in the development and enrichment of Ontario’s children.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign this petition.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth, is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

Obviously I agree with that petition. I’ll sign it and I’m going to give it to page Philip Spencer to bring it to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

“Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

“Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

“Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

“Whereas a coroner’s jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day.”

I've affixed my signature as well. Thank you kindly, sir.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River):

I'd like to present the following petition on behalf of my colleague from Niagara Falls, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

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

“There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program.”

I support this petition, I put my signature to it and I send it with page Philip.

1520

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I've received more petitions to do with pedestrian access to the Mary Lake dam, and they read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

“Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

“Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

“Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

“Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

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

“That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely.”

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by residents of London. It reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government to take action to ensure that residents in Ontario long-term-care homes are treated with dignity and respect. This sector has been underfunded, with increased reliance on for-profit operators while resident health needs grow in complexity and scope. The residents of these homes are the most vulnerable within our communities, and they deserve no less. We call upon the government to immediately enact a minimum staffing standard in Ontario long-term-care homes. Each long-term-care home must be both required by regulation and equitably funded to provide a minimum amount of nursing and personal care for each resident. US studies have shown a staffing level in excess of four hours necessary to ensure optimal care. Studies indicate a direct link between quality care and staffing levels in nursing homes. To ensure optimal care for residents, funding enhancements for nursing and personal care need to be directed to hiring front-line staff and not be used to reduce deficits or hire clerical staff, as has occurred in the past. Health care workers are providing care to as many as twice the number of residents common only a decade ago.”

I agree with the petitioners and I affix my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'm delighted to tell you that this petition is also in support of the MPP for Mississauga West, Mr. Delaney, and it has to do with access to trades and professions in Ontario. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair

Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to sign this petition, and I'll pass it on to page Arianne to send it to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved second 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.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Bountrogianni, you have the floor.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Bountrogianni. Once you get it, you don't forget it.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today to begin second reading debate on Bill 173, the Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act.

There is currently a 40% gap between what MPPs earn at Queen's Park and what MPs are making on Parliament Hill. This legislation proposes steps to close this gap. The province's Integrity Commissioner, the Honourable Coulter Osborne, recognized the need for reform in his recent report on provincial members' compensation. He also 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. The changes we are proposing are in keeping with his recommendations.

The Integrity Commissioner observed that a provincial member's salary is \$88,771, while a federal member is paid \$147,700—a 40% gap. He called for provincial members' compensation levels to be linked to federal members' salaries. We represent the same ridings and the same number of constituents as federal MPs, and, in his view, MPPs should not earn 60% of what their MPs earn.

Our government agrees. So does Marilyn Churley, who used to sit with the third party. She said on December 13:

"I think there are reasonable grounds, and have been for some time, for a salary increase, I really do, when you compare it to other jurisdictions, federally in particular, and in this case it was the Integrity Commissioner who did a study. But I do agree ... that there should be a salary increase.... It has been going on for years and years and years where there has been no increase whatsoever, and I do know that MPPs do work very hard."

Just this morning another former MPP from the NDP caucus, David Christopherson, a good friend of mine, also was cited as saying:

"The constituency responsibility of provincial members is as great, if not greater, in terms of just the raw number of casework that comes in. Quite frankly, it's just upside down when you've got quality councillors, say, in the city of Toronto who will not even think about running for the Ontario Legislature because they would have to take a pay cut."

Under this new compensation plan, an MPP would earn roughly \$110,000—75% of what federal members receive. This is only 14% more than city councillors in Toronto and Ottawa, who now earn \$95,000 a year.

While the federal government contributes to the funding of health care, we deliver it. While they contribute to the funding of post-secondary education, we on the ground deliver education, from junior kindergarten all the way through post-doctoral programs. We have the principal responsibility for care and management of our natural environment and for strengthening our economy.

What we are proposing is to move forward to reduce this gap from 40% to 25%. It is a measured and reasonable step, especially when considering, as the Integrity Commissioner did, that MPPs' salaries have not kept up with inflation since 1996.

Cette question suscitera toujours un débat animé aussi bien de la part de ceux qui estiment que les politiciens ne devraient pas être rémunérés du tout que de tous ceux qui aimeraient que les salaires des politiciens soient mis au diapason de ceux du secteur privé.

Cette proposition démontre notre leadership. Elle cherche concrètement à combler l'écart de rémunération par des mesures responsables et réfléchies.

We believe that the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations strike a balance between these extremes, and so we are following his recommendations. The Integrity Commissioner recommended in his December 7, 2006, report that MPPs' pension arrangements be reviewed.

If passed, the legislation would increase the contribution the province makes to a provincial member's registered pension plan from 5% to 10% of salary. This falls short of the Integrity Commissioner's recommendation that MPPs' pension rights be, at minimum, equal to the pension rights of members of the Ontario public service. Even with these modest changes, this is still only about one quarter to one third of what federal members receive. As with the proposed salary changes, we are

doing this to bring MPPs' pension contribution levels more in line with other pension plans.

1530

We're not going back to a gold-plated pension plan like the one that the federal MPs enjoy and one which was once in place in Ontario, prior to 1995. We are not proposing to rewrite the pension framework for MPPs. We're simply increasing the province's contribution to the existing plan in order to narrow the gap between compensation of federal and provincial representatives.

The legislation, if passed, would also change the severance allowance for MPPs. The current severance allowance is one month's salary for each year of service, with a minimum payment of six months and a maximum payment of 12 months. We are proposing that this be changed to create three levels of severance: MPPs with up to four years of service would be allowed six months' salary as severance; those with up to eight years of service would be allowed 12 months' severance; and those with more than eight years of service would be allowed 18 months' severance. Again, this addresses the compensation gap in a reasonable way, respecting the contribution of long-serving MPPs.

We believe that as long as we continue to work hard and serve the best interests of the people of Ontario and the constituents we represent, every one of us deserves to be compensated at least 75% of what our federal counterparts earn. But this legislation also shows our respect for the views of those in this House who do not agree. Upon passage, sitting MPPs within 60 days have the choice to permanently opt out of the new pay and benefits package and continue to be compensated as they are now. Any new MPP—not re-elected MPPs—would be automatically covered by the new framework.

I know that members on all sides of this House did not run for office because of the compensation they would receive, but because of the contributions they could make. In fact, it is a tremendous privilege to serve Ontarians. But at the same time, compensation should not be a deterrent to anyone considering making a contribution to the province as an elected representative. The Integrity Commissioner said that there's a real risk of this happening. He said that if we stay within the current system, we run the risk of making Queen's Park a farm team for Parliament Hill in Ottawa. But Ontarians deserve the brightest and best, and we continue to attract the same calibre of talented individuals who sit here today.

This is not an easy issue because in the end we, as members of the Legislature, must vote on our own compensation. Ontarians can't do that. This is why the Integrity Commissioner recommended that we pass a new law linking our compensation to that paid to Ontario's representatives in the House of Commons. This is what we have done. This legislation is fair, it is in the public interest and I urge all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's a pleasure to speak, at least for a couple of minutes. I look

forward to my leader's lead and then to speak longer on this bill, but suffice it to say that there is a bill before this House that has passed second reading calling for a minimum wage—I hesitate even to say “increase”; it's catch-up. In 1972, the minimum wage was \$2 a day. Today, using the inflation calculator, that would be just under \$10, and we can't get committee hearings in January and February out of this government to even look at that bill. Here we have a government that very callously goes ahead and votes itself an increase of 31%, when we're asking for 25% for the poorest of our working families. That's number one.

Number two: Of course, today we heard the very cynical response from Dalton McGuinty that the reason that people give to charities is because of the tax benefits. I find that appalling. I'm a United Church clergy by trade. I know clergy, priests and social workers who are working as many hours a day as we are, who work at extremely difficult tasks and who rely on the charitable givings of others. That this government would suggest that charitable givings are motivated by tax benefits is absolutely cynical to the utmost degree, but of course this is a cynical government. This is a government that will not rescind the clawback of the national child supplement. This is a government that will not provide status-of-the-artist legislation and a liveable wage to artists, who are among the poorest in this province. This is a government that will not provide the housing that they promised—20,000 units—and we have 122,000 families in this province waiting for housing. This is a government that will not provide enforcement of the employment standards that we have now, so that one in three employers actually owe their employees money. This is a government that won't see any of that happen, so why should we be surprised?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): The member from Hamilton Mountain, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for democratic renewal, has encapsulated the view of the Liberal Party, and I want to thank her for doing so. Over the last 16 years, there's been a 5% increase, total, in our pay.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I feel it's unfair to mesh in this particular issue with all of the other ills and problems that we're having in our overall society. This issue is about attracting people to this place who can make intelligent, reasoned decisions about those kinds of issues.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): Madame la ministre, j'ai une couple de questions faisant affaire avec le débat. Ne pensez pas pour deux secondes que je dis que le travail que font les députés n'est pas un travail important, et il faut s'assurer, à la fin de la journée, qu'ils soient bien rémunérés.

Le point pour nous autres est très simple. Dans une société où il y a du monde qui regarde le gouvernement provincial pour avoir de l'assistance—dans ma partie de la province, comme dans d'autres parties de la province—il y a des travailleurs qui ont perdu leur emploi à cause de la fermeture de leur usine. Je regarde

par exemple la compagnie Tembec à Timmins, Tembec à Smooth Rock Falls et Tembec encore à Opasatika, et les autres qui ont perdu leur emploi. C'est pas mal difficile pour nous de dire, « Oui, on veut prendre une augmentation, » quand eux autres regardent le gouvernement pour avoir de l'assistance et ils ne voient pas l'assistance qui leur revient. Comme mon amie M^{me} DiNovo a dit, ceux qui sont les plus démunis de notre société, ceux qui travaillent pour un salaire minimum et d'autres qui reçoivent l'assistance sociale, regardent le gouvernement et disent : « Aidez-nous. Nous, les plus démunis de la société, avons chaque jour le problème de garder le pain sur la table et garder les lumières allumées. Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire pour nous assister? »

Vous savez que, dernièrement, le prix de l'électricité a augmenté encore, dans nos comtés, justement. J'imagine que vous avez eu chez vous, comme moi chez nous, des coups de téléphone où ceux qui sont les plus démunis dans notre société disent, « Regardez, depuis les dernières années, le prix de tout garder sur la table a augmenté—l'électricité, le gaz, les taxes foncières municipales—et nos pensions n'ont pas augmenté. » Ce monde-là veulent avoir de l'aide de leur gouvernement provincial.

Le point que je veux faire dans ce débat, c'est que je ne suis pas contre l'idée que nous soyons bien payés, mais je suis contre l'idée qu'on ne fasse rien pour assister ceux dans notre société qui sont les plus démunis et qui font appel au gouvernement provincial pour de l'assistance. Quand le gouvernement dit, « Non, on ne vous donnera pas d'assistance, mais on va se donner une augmentation salariale, » c'est difficile à prendre. Pour cette raison, je vais voter contre, et je me demande pourquoi vous ne cherchez pas à aider les autres.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister Bountrogianni, you have two minutes to reply.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: I thank my colleagues from Parkdale–High Park, Brant, Lanark–Carleton and Timmins–James Bay. I truly do thank the member from Timmins–James Bay for his honesty and transparency on this issue.

It's never a good time to do this. There are people who think all politicians make too much money. There are people who think we make just as much as our federal counterparts. There are people out there who think we have the pensions that our federal counterparts make. In fact, when I was with friends this weekend trying to explain the background of this bill, they too, and they've known me for 20, 30 years, didn't realize that our colleagues here don't have a pension.

This is not an easy issue, and I understand that there's more to be done in the province of Ontario. I agree that there's more to be done, and we will continue to work for the people of Ontario. But this is about the value of the work that we do here. We are no one's farm team here in the Legislature. We have good, intelligent members. And it's not just the members from the Liberal caucus who are being lobbied to go other places like the federal government, or headhunters calling us for better jobs; it's across

the House: Marilyn Churley, Mr. Baird, Mr. Flaherty and others; Mr. Christopherson, of course, who today came out and said that he thinks it's about time that we did this; and Marilyn Churley last week as well.

Interjection: Gerard Kennedy.

1540

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Gerard Kennedy, of course.

There's value. We represent the largest province in the country. We represent one of the largest jurisdictions in the world if you look at our GDP. Ontario matters; Ontario's important. The work we do here matters. This bill begins to address the gap between what we do, very important work, and what our federal counterparts do.

I understand and respect the views of all members of this House. I respect the offers to donate the monies to charity. We can amend the bill very easily by having a trust fund for the increases for those who want to donate it to charities. We can do that very easily and very quickly this week.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Sterling: Having been a member of this Legislative Assembly for almost 30 years now, I have been through this debate before. I've been through this tangle before. I've been through this difficult debate before. While I congratulate the Premier in bringing forward a bill to deal with this issue, I'm sure that it isn't all altruism on his part. It's from a practical need that he faces and a practical need that our leader, John Tory, faces, and that's why he's supporting this bill. In order to attract good, reasoned people, leaders in the community, to come to this place, it's necessary to deal with the compensation issue.

In fact, I might add that the Integrity Commissioner, when he made his report, made it absolutely clear that he did not feel it makes any sense to directly or indirectly link provincial members' compensation to the average wage paid to a worker. He then goes on to point out, however, that many police officers, teachers, tool-and-die makers, judges, bus drivers—and the list goes on—make more than the compensation that MPPs are presently paid.

Now, over this period of time that we've been talking about and as indicated in the Integrity Commissioner's report—the Integrity Commissioner has a table in his report on page 6 which shows the benefits of a member here in 1990. I think one of the things is that unfortunately, when we talk about pay or salaries, we don't talk about the total benefit package that a person receives. For me and for members of this Legislature, it's not the salary that is perhaps the most important; it's the total benefit package that we receive as members here. When I was first elected back in 1977, the attraction of coming to the Legislative Assembly from a very successful law practice had nothing to do with the salary—in fact, the salary I accepted here was about 50% of what I earned in my last year practising law—but it was the defined benefit pension plan where I could protect my family in the future which was the attraction here.

I think what we have to talk about here is, what is the total benefit package that members have been receiving here from 1990 to the present date? In 1990, members received three things from the Legislative Assembly: They received a salary, which was \$44,675; they received a tax-free allowance, which was almost \$15,000; and they had a defined benefit pension plan that was very, very good. In fact, it was worth somewhere between 35% and 40% of their salary, which means it was, in money terms, about \$15,000. This was proven later when all of those schemes were transferred into a salary package in 1995-96. That package in 1990 was worth about \$80,000. Right now, MPPs, before this bill is passed, are receiving a total package of about \$93,000. So the compensation package for MPPs has increased by \$13,000 from 1990 to 2006. That is an increase of probably about 20%. The broader public sector has improved their salary and benefit packages by over 50% over that period of time. What that has led to is this report by the Integrity Commissioner.

I also want to point out that federal MPs, who represent the same number of people in the same boundaries, who have the same constituencies as us, receive a benefit package of over \$200,000 a year. Actually, the benefit package that MPPs are receiving now is about 45% of what federal MPs are receiving in their total benefit package. Their defined benefit plan is worth 35% of their salary base; 35% of \$147,000 is about \$60,000 a year. So they're not only receiving \$147,000 a year; they're receiving in kind, in terms of their benefit package, about \$60,000 a year. Their total package is over \$200,000. So while our Premier is going to be receiving under \$200,000, his brother, David McGuinty, who represents the same constituency as the Premier, still has a better benefit package after Bill 173 is implemented than his brother. David McGuinty has a better package than Dalton McGuinty even though Dalton is Premier and David McGuinty is a backbencher in the opposition.

I bring forward those numbers to show what has happened over the last 15 or 16 years. It's been the fault of our system and the leaders who have been in place during that period of time and their advisers. Premiers, and people who are on the staff of Premiers, are very reticent to come forward to even talk about benefits for MPPs because it evokes such a visceral reaction from the press and from everyone else.

What has happened, of course, is that while we have sat almost in a stagnant position since 1990, other democratic institutions have continued to progress and have given inflationary increases in terms of the benefit package and the salaries to their elected representatives. This is true at the federal level, as I say, where an ordinary MP now has a benefit package of over \$200,000, and we have seen it as well at the municipal level, where they have increased, in their case, their salary and their pension benefits equally as much as inflation has taken hold.

I think the greatest criticism here is that it has been left in neglect for so long that the increase seems excessive in

terms of the percentage that has been going up. So we find ourselves in this particular position that we now are.

I want to quote from my friend Sean Conway, who is now retired, who was asked this weekend—it was quoted in one of the newspapers:

“‘In the last few years, I've actually seen something I've never seen before,’ said Sean Conway, a Ontario legislator who represented Renfrew for more than 28 years before leaving public office for private opportunities in teaching and in consulting.

“‘People are now leaving Queen's Park to go back to a municipal government because the pay, the working conditions—including being at home—and what I will call the electoral stability are much more advantageous,’ he said.”

1550

We all know that virtually every incumbent who ran for council in the city of Ottawa—I think there were 17 of 18 incumbents who got re-elected—and virtually every incumbent who ran for council here in the city of Toronto got re-elected as well. The most vulnerable position seems to be the mayor, or the head of council, in terms of longevity in getting re-elected, whereas in this place the average length of service for members here now is eight and a half years. That's about what it is for all of the 103 members who are sitting here with us today. And, when a member leaves here after eight years of service, he or she may not have the same skills that they had when they entered here to go back into the private workforce.

I know from some of my colleagues from the former Conservative Party who were unfortunate in not being re-elected in 2003 that some of them had a very, very difficult time in obtaining employment when they returned to the private sector after they had been here. Those were people not only with limited education but those who had university training, university degrees, had professional designations and other skills. So the notion that, once one is here for any period of time, you go back into the private sector and use your political experience as a positive is not necessarily true.

I also want to talk about the fact that I really do believe our work here is important. I think that being a member of the Ontario Legislature is one of the best jobs in the world. I certainly didn't come here because of the monetary rewards for serving here, nor do I believe that other members in this Legislature came here and that that was their primary reason for coming here. We come here because we want to change things for the better for our families, for our communities, and if we're lucky enough to be put in a position that we can do that, then we have a very satisfying career here in what we do.

But I also believe that we should, as I said before, attract the best that we can in order to do that. Over the period of time that I have been here, the budget of Ontario has gone from—and I'm going to use approximate figures here—about \$18 billion to \$20 billion to about \$85 billion or \$87 billion. That's a four-fold increase. That doesn't just mean that we're spending more money

on things than we did in 1977; we are much more involved in society and the problems have become more complex. So members must be able to understand what the issues are about and must understand where the differences are in order to bring forward resolution to those particular problems and conflicts that we're asked to do.

Jim Coyle of the Toronto Star wrote an article that I would like to quote from as well. He's talking about some of the demands on politicians:

"It's not for nothing the toll on marriages and health is high among politicians, that stress makes rates of alcoholism and ... drug addiction higher, it's been reported, than in the general population.

"It is a bizarre society that complains endlessly about the quality of its politicians and leadership, demands that they master the most complicated of subjects, come up with solutions to our most intractable problems, do so without ever changing their mind, do so under constant glare of media attention and put up cheerfully with whatever character assassination commentators and voters want to hurl their way—and do so for far less money than most could make in the private sector, at pay rates vastly outmatched by those who shoulder a fraction of the responsibility."

As I said, I come to this job voluntarily, and I think it's a great job because it gives me a great opportunity to have an influence on the direction my province is taking and has taken over the last 30 years. However, if we are to ensure that as we go forward we will have people who will come to this place who will be able to make the decisions and understand the complicated process and go back and listen to our people in our constituencies, to bring those here, we must be competitive in what we're going to offer those people.

Members of the Legislature have families too: They have children, they have grandchildren, they have mothers, they have fathers etc. And they have the same kinds of financial and fiscal responsibilities as anybody else does in society. And we have, in addition, the burden of extra costs. We have larger-than-average wardrobes in order to be able to undertake our business; we have—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Not all of us.

Mr. Sterling: Well, some of us do; some of us don't.

But the cost is not as important as the ability to attract those other people into this place. I have talked with candidates, or people who would like to serve in this place, over the last five to 10 years, and it has become increasingly difficult to convince them that they should come to this place because they just have not been able to see how they would be able to do this in a financial way.

Unfortunately, members of the Legislature—us, ourselves—have been very, very cynical about this whole process. Whenever a member or a person stands up about the needs of members, we attack each other. Those attacks are duly recorded in the media because they raise great attention and great relish. I have great respect for people who give their life to this Legislature and to all democratic institutions, and I believe that we can only

keep the level of MPPs coming to this place up if we are willing to deal in reality with what the competing forces are. Therefore, I strongly support the minister in this bill. I believe that her statements are correct, and I and my party will be supporting this legislation because it's needed for us all to attract people who would seek to be MPPs to come to this place.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker. I want to indicate right off the bat that I've got time for the member for Lanark–Carleton. I appreciate his comments on this matter, and the comments are well laid out. But I say this: It's not just the money. It's the fact that, as the Premier has said and others have echoed, "There's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so let's do it." Because the similar comment is made around, let's say, minimum wage: "It's not a good time to increase minimum wage, so let's not do it." It's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so let's do it, but it's not a good time to increase the benefits for people on social assistance, so let's not do it. It's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, the Premier says, so let's do it. But it's not the right time to increase the pensions of people with disabilities, so let's not do it. The Premier says it's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so, what the hey; let's do it. But it's not the time to keep our promise to end the clawback of the child benefit to those poorest families in the province, so we won't do it.

This, I say to you, Speaker, is the dilemma for MPPs. MPPs do have the authority and the power to set their own salaries. I, for one, do not accept the proposition of delegating it to somebody else somewhere else. But I say this: When we do things like setting our salaries, we should do it in such a way as to not shock the sensibilities of the public, as to not outrage hard-working people out there. "Hey, I earn \$20,000 or \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year, and I've been waiting longer than you have. I don't have the power to increase my own salary," that low-income worker says. "I need your help to do it." Why can we drop partisan differences when it comes to self-interest but not when it comes to minimum wage?

1600

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity. The member for Lanark–Carleton offers us sage advice, as he is now the co-dean of this place—not "codeine" as in cough medicine, but "co" as in sharing the talents of himself and my friend Jim Bradley.

Just a point I want to echo, and maybe he can comment on it: In the past 16 years, there's been a 5.8% increase in this place, because you have to include the two cuts, the freezes and the two increases, so an average of a 5.8% increase over 16 years. That's a long time, an awfully long time, to have a 5.8% increase when everyone else is still going up.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I appreciate the comments that have been made by the member from Lanark–Carleton. He has been here a long time—a bit longer than me. He's the Chair of the committee I sit on.

I respect the work that he does. I'd ask him, though, when he talks about context and reality, to put this in some context and some reality.

He talked about the benefit package. Fair enough. I say, what about the benefit package for the workers at Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls who just got the terrible news that this is an indefinite layoff? The mill is not going to open again. What about the package for the workers at Cascades in Thunder Bay who have been given the news or given the pink slip? What about the workers at the sawmill in Nairn Centre who were told that they have no more employment, or the workers who used to bring the logs out of the bush into that mill and who lost their jobs in March of this year, or the workers at the Kenora paper mill who are out of a job, or the workers at the Dryden sawmill who lost their jobs when that went down? That list goes on and on and on and is directly linked to this government's hydro policy. I won't dwell on that, but that list goes on and on and on.

You want to talk about context? I don't think the public would mind at all a 3% or 4% increase, maybe, to catch us up over a number of years. But the reality is, we've got 4,000 forestry workers in northern Ontario who don't have a job anymore, and they pick up the paper and see this? I talked to a young woman last week who said to me, "Do you know that the increase you're going to get is bigger than my annual salary, and I'm working 40 hours a week?" I've got a problem with that; I really do.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

The member for Lanark–Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Sterling: I would like to also point out that—
Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I'd like to hear the member who has the floor, please.

The member for Lanark–Carleton.

Mr. Sterling: I would like to also point out what the compensation levels of this Legislative Assembly have done, in the words of our Integrity Commissioner: "Inadequate compensation over time works to devalue both the Legislative Assembly as an institution and the important responsibilities of its members." Further, "If the compensation arrangements at one level of government, such as those in place for members of the House of Commons, are substantially better than compensation arrangements in place provincially, there will inevitably be a movement from Toronto to Ottawa."

He also said that compensation arrangements should not be "a deterrent to those considering entering or staying in provincial public life."

I think the Integrity Commissioner has really captured it in terms of his report. It's unfortunate that our leaders in the past did not make incremental improvements to the benefit packages that we were receiving in 1990 and years beyond, but we are where we are and we must take action in order to ensure that this institution continues to attract quality people.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm pleased to take part in this debate today because I think this is an important debate for a number of reasons. For people who are at home who may be watching this, this is about the kind of pay raise that members of provincial Parliament in Ontario should receive. What the McGuinty government is proposing, when you add in all the numbers, is a pay increase in the range of 30%. It is the argument of the McGuinty government that a pay increase for MPPs in the range of 30% is appropriate in the times that we live in.

It is the position of New Democratic members of the Legislature and it is my position that a 30% holus-bolus pay increase is not acceptable. I think people at home need to understand this. This is not 30% phased in over four years or five years; it's not 4%, 4% and 4%. This is a holus-bolus increase of 30% in one year.

I want to put that in context. It is an increase of over \$27,000, when you add up all the numbers. Most of the residents of my constituency do not receive \$27,000 a year, never mind receive a pay increase of \$27,000 in one year. In fact, a number of people in my constituency have been told that they no longer have a job. They're taking a very significant pay cut. In fact, they're being told that the destruction of their job is permanent. Other people in my constituency are being told, "You want to keep your job? Work longer, work harder and work for less."

So that is the context of what is happening out there. I believe we always have to make these decisions in context. We always have to think of them in terms of the everyday life of ordinary Ontarians—what people are facing, what they're struggling with, what they're dealing with.

I really have a number of objections to the way the government has proceeded and what's involved, but I want to break them out because I think they all need to be explored and addressed. One of the problems I have with this legislation is the process, the procedure. You see, ordinarily, if this Legislature is dealing with legislation, a bill is introduced, there's first reading, then there's a vote. Sometimes that vote is a summary, a voice vote only, and sometimes it's a vote where members have to stand in their place. Then there is second reading debate—debate in principle. Then, most often, legislation goes out to committee for public hearings so that the public can have a say. I think that's the essence of democracy. After all, we are not a power here unto ourselves; we are here as representatives of the people. And if we're going to pass legislation, the people deserve a chance to be heard. They deserve a chance to have their views considered.

1610

Ordinarily, legislation will come for second reading. If it passes second reading debate, it will go out to committee. There will be public hearings. Sometimes the public hearings are held here at Queen's Park; sometimes they travel across the province. Then amendments are made and legislation comes back for third reading. So There's a fairly extensive process. In fact, the legislation

may actually be advertised and the public hearings may be advertised so that the public really does understand what is before the Legislature and the public will have a chance to have their say. Is the government proceeding with this legislation in this way? Absolutely not. The government is already indicating that it is not interested in public hearings. The government has already indicated that it wants to ram this legislation through before Christmas, when the legislation was only introduced—with no public statement, no indication the legislation was coming—last week.

What we have here is a government that is trying to usher through a 30% pay increase and trying to do it under the cover of Christmas, trying to do it with minimal involvement of the public, minimal opportunity for the public to know about it, to think about it, to have a chance to hold public hearings, to voice their approval or voice their concerns. This is legislation that is, shall we say, not receiving the full flourish of democracy. But this is a government that is trying to keep this issue off the public radar screen and, as I say, ram it through as quickly as possible with minimal public input and, they hope, minimal public attention.

In my view, that is not acceptable, especially when we are dealing, I would argue, with an issue which smacks of private interest, smacks very much of, shall we say, pecuniary interest of members of the Legislature. In that kind of situation, in my view, we need to open ourselves up to public scrutiny. We need to open ourselves up to public awareness. But that is not happening here today and it's not going to happen here the rest of this week. The government will employ a battering ram, and the government will do all that it can to avoid public scrutiny, avoid public hearings and avoid public attention to this issue. As I say, I think the process is wrong. Trying to use the cover of Christmas holidays and the Christmas recess to avoid public scrutiny in my view smacks of things that none of us should be proud of.

In contrast to the government's rush, the government's battering ram to get this legislation through, I just want to note some of the other legislation that has passed second reading and languishes while the McGuinty government acts with all haste and all speed and all tenacity to ram through this legislation. For example, there is Bill 164, the Community Right to Know Act, which would require disclosure of toxins and pollutants in everyday household products. This bill has passed second reading and is waiting for hearings. Is the government going to move quickly on this legislation? Not at all.

Or there is Bill 111, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, with respect to occupational diseases and injuries of firefighters, otherwise known as the Bob Shaw act. This passed second reading earlier this year. It is waiting for hearings. Is the government going to act on that in a speedy way? No; in fact, this bill will be lucky if it receives any public hearings or moves forward under this government.

Bill 150, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, which would raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour:

This legislation has also passed second reading and is waiting for hearings. Has the government acted on that? No, the McGuinty government seems not to be in any way in favour of moving forward on that legislation.

Bill 30, An Act to reduce the incidence of needlestick injuries in our hospitals and homes for the aged: We know that many, many nurses, many health care workers' own personal health and safety is at risk as a result of us not providing better needlestick prevention. This bill has received second reading and is overwhelmingly favoured by workers who work in the health sector in Ontario. Is the government going to move forward with this bill? Are they moving forward with even modest haste on this bill? No, not at all. But when it comes to a pay raise, the government is prepared to act with great haste and with no consideration of public hearings.

Then there's Bill 126, which would create a jobs commissioner for Ontario and, we hope, would duplicate the good work done by the jobs commissioner in British Columbia in ensuring that manufacturing jobs, forest sector jobs—ensuring that the government has a strategy to reduce that job destruction and sustain many of those jobs which are at risk. Is the government prepared to move forward with that legislation? No, not at all.

I could cite other legislation. My colleague Mr. Prue, from Beaches—East York, sponsored a private member's bill which would ensure greater fire protection and fire safety from fires in homes and apartment buildings. It has the support of firefighters across the province. It has the support of those people who are expert in fire prevention and reducing damage and loss of human life and suffering from fires. Is the government prepared to move forward with that legislation? Not at all; no haste, no willingness on the part of the government to move forward.

Again I say, a part of my concern here is the hasty process, the desire on the part of the McGuinty government to ram through this legislation and hope that while people are focused upon Christmas and the holiday season, no one will notice this attempt to ram through a 30% pay increase.

I think there are substantive problems as well, and I now want to deal with those. I mentioned earlier that context is important. In that context I want to point out this: New Democrats are not opposed to a modest pay increase for MPPs. We've indicated on the record several times that we would be prepared to support a 2% or a 3% increase. We'd even be prepared to support a further 2% on that in terms of catching up with the cost of living, so overall a 5% increase. We also would be quite prepared—and I know Mr. Sterling, my colleague from Lanark—Carleton, spoke about this—to support a defined-benefit pension plan, because it's our belief that every worker should have a pension, that no worker should go into their senior years suffering from income insecurity. But it's important to note that what the government has brought forward is far more than a 31% pay increase and far, far less than a defined-benefit pension plan. So again, context is important. I could support a modest pay increase. I could support members of this Legislature being

allowed to join the Ontario public service pension plan. But this legislation doesn't provide for that. What it provides for is a very quick, holus-bolus money grab, in excess of \$27,000 a year. I do not think, in the context of what we see in Ontario today, that that can be justified.

1620

I want to address some of the arguments the government has put forward in support of this legislation. One of them, which I think is insulting to several people, is when the government says, if they don't drive up MPPs' salaries by 30%, and do it now, immediately, that somehow Queen's Park is going to empty, that somehow all the members here are going to run off and find another job or run off and find some other occupation. I just wanted to note a few things in relation to that.

We've had a number of by-elections over the last few years. I didn't notice any difficulty in terms of finding candidates to run in those by-elections. In fact, I remember the Premier appointing candidates so that he could avoid having nomination battles and having three or four people contest for the nomination. I haven't noticed, in any of the by-elections that we've held, that people suddenly scurry off the stage and say, "Oh, no, I'm not interested in seeking the nomination. I'm not interested in running to become a member of the Ontario Legislature." Again, a number of by-elections we've had just in the last few years and no evidence that suddenly people aren't interested in becoming a member of the Ontario Legislature.

The second point I'd make is this: Ontario MPPs are already paid more than members of the Legislature in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. There are eight other provinces, and MPPs in Ontario are already paid more than the members of the Legislative Assembly in those eight other provinces.

Now, if I'm going to take and believe the government's rhetoric about, "Oh, you'll become a farm team," then those Legislatures must already be empty. In fact, they just must have been empty for some time, because their pay, as I point out, is less than Ontario's pay. But those Legislatures are not empty. You don't see the members of those Legislatures running for the exits because they feel they are underpaid. In fact, we just saw that the Premier of Alberta stepped down. There wasn't one person who sought to replace him; not two; not three; not four but several people sought to replace the Premier of Alberta, a member of the Alberta Legislature, who gets paid less than we do here in Ontario. I hear the McGuinty government's rhetoric about, "Oh, we'll become a farm team," but there is no objective evidence anywhere to support that kind of statement.

I do believe that Premier McGuinty has a problem within his own caucus. I do believe that, because I know that before the last general election, in 2003, Dalton McGuinty went around the province seeking candidates and promising candidate after candidate that they would become members of a McGuinty cabinet. Lo and behold,

here we are nine months before an election and I know there are many, many members of the McGuinty caucus who have not received yet that promised cabinet position. So I think the problem the Premier has is this: He has a number of people whom he promised a cabinet position to and their cabinet position has not been realized, so the Premier has to find a quick way to, shall we say, mollify some of his members who are disappointed, aggrieved, and perhaps angry that they have not been included in the cabinet. What better way to do that than to bring forward legislation which says, "Oh, I couldn't give you a cabinet job, I didn't give you a cabinet job, but here is \$27,000 and it's happening quickly"? It's not \$27,000 spread over four years—5%, 5%, 5%, 5%—but right now, quickly, when people across Ontario aren't looking. If I may, I believe that is the real problem that is present, and it is a problem, really, for Premier McGuinty, based upon promises that he made to certain numbers of people and now promises that he has not fulfilled. So he wants the taxpayers of Ontario to provide him with the money to, shall we say, massage and mollify members of his own caucus who are less than happy.

That's all I'm going to say about that part of it. But I do want to note some other comparisons. I said earlier that, for example, in my constituency of Kenora-Rainy River, the majority of workers in my constituency will not receive \$27,000 a year, never mind receive a \$27,000 increase in one year. I want to put this in context. The average salary for a woman worker in Ontario is \$25,600 a year. That's \$25,600 a year for the average woman worker. What the McGuinty government wants to do is to usher in a holus-bolus, all-at-once pay increase of more than \$27,000, when the average woman worker in the province is paid only \$25,600 a year.

I said that context is important. I wonder what all those women workers—many of whom, to get an average, would be making less than \$25,600 a year—would think if we were simply to rubber-stamp this and whistle it through, as the McGuinty government and members of the Conservative caucus want us to do. I think that is unacceptable.

We also have to look at this from the context of what else is happening in the economy. What we know from Statistics Canada—and I think it's interesting—is that we're seeing a greater concentration of wealth in our society, so the wealthiest 20% of families now hold 69.2% of the total net wealth in Canada. That is up from 68.5%, which was the figure in 1999. That increase in share was entirely at the expense of the middle 20%, whose share dropped from 8.8% of wealth to 8.4% of wealth. In other words, what it says is the McGuinty government wants this \$27,000-a-year increase just as middle-income families are actually seeing their pay packages being reduced. Certainly they're not seeing pay increases of 30%. They're not seeing pay increases of 20%. They're not seeing pay increases of 10%. I would suggest they're not seeing pay increases of even 5%.

To put this in the context of low-income Ontarians, low-income workers, the reality is, if you look at what's

happening out there in the big picture, that the lowest-income people in our province are actually receiving less income now, relatively speaking, than they were receiving even five or six years ago. That is the context within which the McGuinty government wants to drive through, ram through, a \$27,000-a-year pay increase, a pay increase that is greater than, as I say, 30%.

1630

I want to raise some other issues in the context of this discussion. The other issues I want to talk about have to do with other provinces. I indicated earlier that eight of the other provinces have MPP pay scales that are less than Ontario MPPs—far less than Ontario MPPs. I think we need to look at, once again, the context here, the context of next door. Next door we have the province of Manitoba, where MLAs there do no less important work than we do and wrestle with the same kinds of difficult issues we wrestle with, but are paid far less than we are in Ontario—or Saskatchewan or Alberta or British Columbia. I think those are very important issues to think about in terms of the context.

I want to raise the general argument that somehow—and I think it's implicit in this government's argument—we should measure the worth of people by the size of their paycheques. We're starting to see that happening increasingly under the McGuinty government. Let me just give you an example. Six years ago in Ontario, the head of Ontario Hydro was paid about \$500,000 a year, and the people who worked under him, the vice-presidents and so on, were paid less than that. What have we witnessed under the McGuinty government? Well, we've witnessed that, for example, the departing head of Hydro One under the McGuinty government—his salary and bonus escalated to \$1.6 million. He received from the McGuinty government—actually he received this money from the hydro consumers of the province, but it was under the direction and auspices of the McGuinty government: People across the province paid a \$125,000 mortgage subsidy on his mansion in Oakville; hydro consumers of the province paid for him to have a luxury car; hydro consumers of the province paid for him every year to fly back to Australia on an all-expenses-paid vacation; then, finally, the people of Ontario were paying for him to hide about \$45,000 of his personal expenses on his secretary's credit card.

You'd wonder, why does somebody who has \$1.6 million in salary, who already has an annual vacation to Australia paid for, who gets a \$125,000 mortgage subsidy, who gets his expensive luxury car paid for by hydro consumers—why would someone like that have to hide \$45,000 of personal expenses on his secretary's credit card? I'll let the government explain that. But what it says to me is that this sense that you value a person by how large their paycheque is doesn't bear much truth when you look at Hydro One. Has performance improved at Hydro One? It's hard to tell by the people who live in my part of the province, who increasingly experience irregular and not very dependable delivery of electricity. It's hard to tell by the major employers who have been

put out of work in my part of the province because hydro rates have escalated through the roof under the McGuinty government.

So this argument that the McGuinty government wants to parlay out there—that somehow people should be judged by the size of their paycheque, and if only you increase the size of the paycheque, you're going to get better people—doesn't bear scrutiny at Hydro One. I would suggest that it doesn't bear scrutiny at Ontario Power Generation either. I would suggest it doesn't bear scrutiny at the Ontario Power Authority or the Independent Electricity System Operator. Under the McGuinty government, the pay of executives at all of these organizations has escalated to a minimum of \$600,000, most of it in excess of \$700,000 a year, and in some cases the pay scale has accelerated to \$1.5 million, \$1.6 million and \$1.7 million a year. If the McGuinty government is trying to argue that they're getting better people as a result of that, you certainly can't find it by the performance of the hydroelectricity system in the province. Just ask anybody who's paying the hydro bill every month and I'm sure they will fill you in on that.

The whole argument here, that somehow pay is the only thing that matters, that the amount of pay is the all-important issue, doesn't bear scrutiny. In fact, my sense is this: Most people who came here didn't care what the pay was, didn't pay any attention to what the salary structure was. People enter public life because they want to make a contribution to public life. They see issues that they feel need to be addressed. They see problems that need to be resolved. They see injustice or wrongs and believe that something needs to be done about it, and they recognize that one way you can make a contribution to that is to be elected and take part in the decision-making. But suddenly the McGuinty government wants people to believe that it's only and all about pay. Well, it is not only about pay. There are many reasons why people choose to come to this place, why people put their name up for nomination, why people put their name on the ballot. To simply argue that it's all about pay I think does an injustice to people who work in public life, not only in this province but across this country.

I said that context was very important in terms of looking at these issues. So one of the other issues that I want to deal with is the plight of the lowest-paid workers in the province. Everyone knows that minimum wage in this province is not a living wage. You could work at three minimum-wage jobs, one during the day, one in the evenings and one on the weekends; you could literally spend all of your waking time working for minimum wage in this province and you would not have a living wage. That is what we're seeing across the province. That is why the number of people going to food banks has escalated. That is why food banks say that they're not able to address all of the needs of all of the people coming to food banks. That's why we now have 122,000 people in this province who are waiting for affordable housing and, in the meantime, are either homeless or living in shelters or substandard housing or insecure

housing. We have a number of people in this province who simply, as the minimum wage now stands, do not have enough income to make ends meet.

1640

New Democrats proposed a modest increase to the minimum wage, to \$10 an hour. We suggested that that would at least approach a living wage in the province. Do you know what the response was of this government? The response of this government was that we couldn't afford a \$10 minimum wage, that a living wage for low-income workers was wrong, that it was the wrong time to do it and the wrong thing to do.

Context is important. It seems to me that what we should be debating here today, what we should be addressing here today and what we should be raising here today is the absolute need to increase the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour so that working people would have a living wage and working people would be better positioned to make ends meet, to pay the rent, to put food on the table, and to look after their children. But at the same time that the McGuinty government proposes a 30% pay increase for itself, issues like the minimum wage have been pushed not onto the back burner; they've been pushed out the rear door. It is pushed as far away as this government can get it from the public agenda.

I'd just say that I'm not opposed to a modest increase in pay for MPPs. I and other New Democrats have indicated we could support a 2% increase, a 3% increase, even a 2% catch-up on top of that. I'm not opposed to a decent defined-benefit pension for MPPs. But this is not here; this is not part of this package. What this package is is a \$27,000 holus-bolus increase in one year.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hampton: I don't believe that can be justified. I don't think it can be justified in the current context of Ontario. I don't think it can be justified especially in terms of those workers who are being told, "You work longer, you work harder, and you work for less."

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Thurston, Thurston.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health Promotion, order, please.

Mr. Hampton: If members of the McGuinty government caucus want to stand up and speak in favour of their 30% increase, I invite them. Stand up and speak in the debate. Stand up and tell the people why you think a 30% pay increase for you is justified. I invite you to take part in the debate. But I sense that members of the McGuinty government want to shout from the sidelines and try to silence debate. There's an unwillingness on their part to get up and take part in the debate.

There are some other context issues that I think are important. One of the context issues that's important is—and if I may just speak for members of the Conservative caucus, Conservatives support the pay increase, but it was not so many years ago that Conservative members voted to get rid of a pension plan for members of provincial Parliament. I hope the Conservative members

today will stand and reconcile their different positions here, because it seems to me that members of the Conservative caucus who just a few years ago were arguing that members of the Legislature were overpaid and didn't deserve a pension plan now want the 30% increase and the increased contributions to—I won't call it a pension plan; I call it an RRSP arrangement. I would hope that the Conservatives would stand and reconcile their differing positions which have happened over the last few years.

I also want to raise the issue of people who are trying to survive on benefits of Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan. I think we need to put that in context too. The fact of the matter is that someone in this province who is disabled and forced to rely upon the Ontario disability support plan is not going to be seeing a 30% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 20% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 15% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 10% increase in benefit. They're not even going to see a 5% increase in benefit; not a 3% increase in benefit. Those people, through no fault of their own, are disabled and are not able to be employed. It would seem to me that if we were operating from principle, shall we say, the McGuinty government would have come forward with a plan to increase those benefits, would have come forward with a program to increase those benefits. Is that happening? No, it's not happening.

Or the situation of Ontario Works: Ontario Works benefits were cut by over 22%, 10 years ago now, and not only were they cut by 22%, but had very little increase since that time. Yet we know that from the rate of inflation, the actual reduction, their loss of income, if you compare the position of people who have to rely upon Ontario Works, has been in excess of 35%. Has the McGuinty government, as a priority, come forward with a plan, with a program for even a modest increase in benefits for those lowest-income Ontarians? Do we see that here? Did we see it yesterday? Will we see it tonight? Will we see it tomorrow? No. No program whatsoever.

Another piece of context: The federal government, through the national child benefit, provides a supplement, provides a benefit, to the lowest-income children in Canada. If family income falls below a certain threshold, the federal government, through the national child benefit, ensures that those children and their families have their income raised. It is not a huge amount of money but, let me tell you, in terms of very-low-income families, it's a significant amount of money. What's important for people at home to realize is that this is the federal government providing this money to the lowest-income children in Ontario. What does the McGuinty government do? The McGuinty government claws back that money. It claws back that money from the lowest-income kids in the province. It claws back in excess of \$250 million a year from the lowest-income kids in the province. I would think that any government that comes forward and wants to ram through legislation giving

MPPs a 30% pay increase—more than a 30% pay increase if you factor in, down the road, some of the severance issues—would have a program, would have a definitive plan to end the clawback of \$250 million from the lowest-income kids in the province. Do we see that from the McGuinty government? Do we even see a hint, a quiet hint, a whispered hint, that that might happen? Not at all. It was promised. It was promised in the last election by the now Premier Dalton McGuinty. But now we're into the fourth year of the McGuinty government, and the McGuinty government continues to claw back \$250 million a year from the lowest-income children in the province at the very same time that the McGuinty government proposes to ram through a 30% pay increase for MPPs.

1650

Again, context is important. Context helps us sort through the promises, the platitudes, and get down to what is really happening. In my view, in the context of workers who are being told, "You work longer, you work harder for less," in the context of workers who have actually had their good-paying jobs destroyed, over 136,000 of them now under the McGuinty government, in the context of the lowest-paid workers who do not receive a living wage through minimum wage; in the context of unfortunate people who are forced to rely upon Ontario disability support plan benefits; in the context of people who are forced to rely upon Ontario Works benefits; in the context of the poorest, the lowest-income children in the province, who actually see the McGuinty government clawing back money from them, supporting a 31% pay increase for members of provincial Parliament and ramming through that kind of pay increase is, I would suggest, not supportable at all.

I actually had someone point out to me just a few days ago, and they were shocked, "I remember Dalton McGuinty promising many things in the last election. In fact, I've got a long, long list of all the things that Dalton McGuinty promised, most of which he hasn't followed through on, most of those promises he has broken, but I don't remember Dalton McGuinty promising a 30% pay increase for MPPs." This person said to me, "Gee, why doesn't Mr. McGuinty focus on carrying through the promises that he actually made rather than now substituting things that were not promised and that people would not have voted for?" I think that's a good point, I think it's a very good point, and one that the Premier and members of the McGuinty government would be wise to heed.

I want to conclude by just pointing out a little bit of history. The minimum wage in 1990 was \$5.40 an hour. By 1995, it had been raised to \$6.85 an hour. The problem, though, is that since 1995, inflation has eaten away most of that \$6.85 an hour. So just to put workers in relatively the same position that they were in in 1995—and again, context is important—we would need a minimum wage of \$10 an hour or more just to put workers, low-paid workers, minimum wage workers, in the context that they were in then. As I say to people, I was

hoping that we'd have some time this week to actually debate minimum wage. I was hoping the McGuinty government would come forward with a plan for minimum wage. But, sad to say, at the same time that the McGuinty government wants to ram through its 30%-plus pay increase for MPPs, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in terms of proposed increases for minimum wage.

When you look at the pay scales of other provinces, when you look at the pay scales—and this is another comparison the McGuinty government likes to make. They like to look at a couple of the larger cities in Ontario and say, "You have Mississauga, you have Toronto; therefore, we should be paid on a scale similar to them." But we have lots of other municipalities in this province and, let me say, the pay scales are nowhere in the \$100,000 range, the \$115,000 range, the \$120,000 range. So if the McGuinty government wants to use that context, then I would argue that the McGuinty government should look at it from the context of all of the municipalities, not just a few that it wants to select in terms of promoting and justifying a 30% pay increase.

One of the things we also have to consider in this Legislature is just generally the issue of public policy, because every time you do something, you create a precedent. Every time you take an action, you create a precedent that is then looked at by other bodies or is put up as an example to other bodies. I ask this question, really, of people across the province; I ask it also of the Premier: What does it say about public policy when a government says, "Oh, a 30% increase, here and now"? What example would other people in the civil service draw from that? What example would nurses draw from that? What example would physicians draw from that? What example would other workers, who may not work for the province but who may work for municipalities or other public agencies, other public institutions, draw from that?

If I may, in my view, that is why what we should be doing here today is debating an increase of 3%. I would even, as I say, support an increase of 5%. But the message that MPPs send, that the McGuinty government sends far and wide across Ontario by trying to ram through a 30% pay increase under the cover of Christmas and the holiday season, is not a good message. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of fairness. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of what public expectations should be. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of responsibility, of accountability. It is not a good message in terms of precedents that people will cite in the future. And being done in the way that it's being done, as I point out, under cover of the Christmas holidays, the holiday season, it is not a good message in terms of transparency either.

Above and beyond the procedure, above and beyond context issues, one of the things that members of the Legislature have to concern themselves with is this: Is this good public policy? Is it good public policy to simply be saying, "Oh, a 30% increase, a \$27,000 increase," holus-bolus, all at once? I would submit that the

majority of people in Ontario, when they look at this, would say, "No, no, this is not a good precedent. This is not good public policy. This is not the example that we want to set for other public agencies. This is not the example that we want to set for the broader public sector. This is not the example that we want to set for young people. This is not the example that we want to set for society at large. This is not the way to do things."

1700

As I said earlier, I invite members of the McGuinty government to stand in debate and defend this 30% increase. I invite them to stand and defend literally taking \$27,000 and holus-bolus putting it in their pocket when we know that the average woman worker in the province gets paid \$25,600 a year. It's not a \$25,600-a-year increase; \$25,600 a year is the average salary of women workers in the province. I don't think there is any public policy justification. I don't think anyone could say that this is good public policy.

Again, talking about context, the government says, "Oh, if you look at other pay scales out there, MPPs deserve a lot more." I think the public needs to know this: Members of provincial parliament in Ontario today, without the pay increase, are in the top 10% of income earners in the province. Our all-in compensation is greater than \$100,000 a year, and that, measured across all the other income earners in Ontario, puts us in the top 10%. It's pretty hard to argue that somebody who's in the top 10% of income earners in the province is underpaid. It's hard to argue that somebody who's in the top 10% of income earners in the province is somehow facing hardship. It's hard to argue, but I invite members of the McGuinty government to stand—they have a lot to say in trying to silence other people—to get into the debate and try to tell us that somebody who is in the top 10% of wage earners and income earners is somehow impoverished, is somehow grossly underpaid, is somehow having a hard time making ends meet.

To put it in context, the increase that the McGuinty government is advocating would then put Ontario MPPs in the top 5%. That's quite a move, to already be in the top 10% of income earners and then, in a holus-bolus \$27,000-in-one-year increase, be put in the top 5% of income earners. When reasonable people across Ontario look at that and say, "Gee, you're already in the top 10% of income earners, and now you want a \$27,000-in-one-year increase to push yourself up to where you're in the top 5% of incomes in the province," I think most of them would say, "Boy, that's a lot." Again, from the perspective of public policy, is that a wise precedent for any government in Ontario, never mind the McGuinty government, to create?

Then put it in the context of the other pay increases that the McGuinty government has not only justified but revelled in. I look at the chair of the Ontario Energy Board, who just three years ago was being paid \$120,000 a year and now, under the McGuinty government, is being paid in excess of almost \$700,000 a year. When I added up the increase, I think it was a \$571,000 pay

increase in three years. Is that the precedent that the McGuinty government wants to set?

I think of the McGuinty government's dear friend Tom Parkinson, his \$600,000 bonus, the \$125,000 subsidy of his mansion in Oakville, hydro ratepayers of the province being forced to pay for his luxury car. All of these things are important. I simply say to people across Ontario: Does this sound like good public policy to you? Does it sound like this is the direction that Ontario ought to be going? Is this the kind of pay increase that the average worker in Ontario has any prospect of looking forward to? I think the average worker across Ontario knows the answer to that is no, no and no.

For all of these reasons—the wrong-headed process the government is using, the huge increase in one holus-bolus move, the perspective of public policy—we cannot support a 30% pay increase for MPPs under the McGuinty government.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Levac: I thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the leader of the third party, for his comments. I did a calculation. He said that he was doing it in the context of social justice. I'll offer him these remarks. In 16 years, there's been a total percentage increase of 5.8%, which translates into a 0.3% increase per year for a member. With the 17th year, the 35.8% that he seems to be adding on, I've added in the 5.8%, for a 17-year grand total of a 2.1% increase over the last 16 years.

Mr. Kormos: As I indicated, I've got time for Norm Sterling from Lanark–Carleton, although I disagree with the position he put forward. I've got to tell you, I've got time for Howard Hampton from Kenora–Rainy River, who's been here since 1987. I've got time for a whole lot of people in this Legislature who both advocate for the salary increase and who oppose it. But you know, folks watching this from the members' gallery and the visitors' gallery, listening to some of the heckling, have got to shake their heads and say to themselves, "These are the same people who want their salaries increased?"

I've got a hard time with people who were elected in 2003, who knew full well what their salaries were going to be, what their pay packages were going to be, and now seem to have joined the chorus of "Me first." I say to you, these same people who vowed that they were going to be different, who vowed that they were going to put their constituents first, who vowed that they were going to fight for the little people—and you know what? Most of them meant it when they said it. Most, if not all, meant it when they said it. Here's your chance, friends. Stand up and tell your government, Liberal backbenchers, to defer this bill until there's a parallel bill coming before this chamber increasing ODSP benefits, increasing social assistance benefits, increasing the minimum wage to the same percentage as you want to increase your own salaries. Show some courage. Show some leadership—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I have a couple of questions for the leader of the NDP that he seems to be avoiding in this

debate. Will Mr. Hampton and his entire caucus opt out of this program? A simple yes or no. If Mr. Hampton accepts—and he claims he wants to send the money to charities—will he accept a government-issued tax receipt? He was asked that question in a scrum this afternoon. It was like Bambi in the headlights. He didn't know what to answer. He was quite put off by that. Will he accept a government-issued tax receipt, thus gaining a benefit monetarily to himself? If he does commit to this charity plan, is it every year as long as he's an MPP, or is it a one-time photo op? Third, will he ensure that the official receipts for the charities he is giving the money to are released publicly every year to prove that he actually gave 100% of the money to the charity?

1710

Let me quote Christina Blizzard: "Let's not be hypocritical here. The NDP can rant all they like about the hike. They can pledge they'll give it to charity. A year from now, we'll all have forgotten those pledges. And who knows who'll have given what to the food bank?"

When I was mayor of the city of Ottawa, I was entitled to \$31,000 in severance at the end of my term. I chose not to accept that severance and not to accept the money and to pass it on to a charity. I had a resolution passed at city council. The money never touched my hands. It went directly—\$31,000—to the Union Mission. I did not benefit personally. The charity benefited.

I challenged Mr. Hampton to do the same thing with his money if he opts out of this program.

Ms. Martel: I want to focus on the process a little bit too, because I am interested in how rapidly this became a priority for the Liberal government. You see, if you go back to December 7, 2006—not 2005; December 7, 2006—this is what Greg Sorbara, the Treasurer of the province, told Canadian Press about the pay increase: "It's not something we're looking at for the current time. We've got other issues to deal with," said the Treasurer of the province of Ontario, who one assumes is speaking for the government when he speaks as Treasurer. But of course he wasn't the only one, because on December 13, 2006—not 2005, but December 13, 2006—here's what the government House leader had to say in the Niagara Falls Review: "I don't anticipate you'll see any significant action on this at all' and that a large pay increase for MPPs 'is not going to happen.'"

Here we are, less than a week after those comments by Mr. Bradley, and oh, do we not have a rush on to ram through a pay bill in this Legislature just before Christmas, when I'm sure the government is hoping that people will be consumed with other things and won't notice what's going on. You see, it wasn't a priority less than two weeks ago but it sure is a heck of a priority now, and that's some process, considering all the other important legislation we should really be dealing with.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kenora–Rainy River, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hampton: I want to respond. First of all, I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for pointing out once again how reliable the McGuinty government is in

its pronouncements. A major pay increase is not a priority, according to the Minister of Finance and according to the government House leader, and, wham, all of a sudden a 30% pay increase is on the table. So I want to give members of the McGuinty government full marks for being just as inconsistent as they always are.

I also want to thank members of the McGuinty government for their grasping efforts to justify a 30% pay increase. What I see is that they will stop at nothing to justify what I think is a pay increase that most people across Ontario would look at and say, "Gee, in terms of process, gee, in terms of context and in terms of making good public policy for the province of Ontario, this is not right."

Members want to know what I will do. I've indicated that I have a choice. I can refuse the pay increase or I can donate it to charities, as Tommy Douglas did, as Stanley Knowles did. Let me ask the member for Ottawa: What are you going to do with what will amount for you to be about a \$50,000 increase? Put it in your own pocket? Is that what you're going to do? I have indicated that I will either contribute it to charity or I will refuse it. So I return the favour to the McGuinty government member from Ottawa: Are you going to deny people on minimum wage an increase? Are you going to tell the poor that you're going to take more money from them while you pocket—

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Order.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kenora–Rainy River, I don't think you want to use that language. Well?

Mr. Hampton: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: One second. Just in all fairness, in rotation I was rather quick, but I think you are the next one to stand. Okay. I was a little quick on that.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to say that this is the time of year when all of our faiths, and I know there are at least one or two people of faith in this chamber, call for generosity to the poorest among us. I'm sure that the symbolism is not lost on the viewers at home, that this is the time of year that Dalton McGuinty's government chooses to ram through a 30% increase not for people on Ontario Works, not for people on ODSP, not for minimum wage earners, where we're asking for a 25% increase—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We are going to have order. I think it's time that we listened to the person who has the floor, and at this time it's the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Not, as I continue, for people on minimum wage are we asking for a 25% increase. No. The Dalton McGuinty Liberals, at this time of year, when all people of faith call for generosity to the poorest among us, are planning on feathering their own nests to the tune of a 30% increase.

It's very interesting that they brought this bill forward at a time when I had invited to the members' galleries about 80, I believe, members of the Toronto Association for Business Improvement Areas—small business owners, retailers, those people who own ma-and-pa stores, who are struggling, who are working hard and who are the major generators of jobs in this province. I went over to the members' gallery and said, "You're going to witness an historic moment. You're going to witness a government giving itself a huge pay increase, one that you're not privy to. In fact, you'll help pay for it."

Why were they here? They were here because of the unfair property taxes assigned to them. There's a resolution before the House on that. But it was appropriate that they witness it and they were appalled. I know that I'm not alone in receiving e-mails and communications from constituents about this very matter. And guess what? Not one e-mail in favour of the increase. All of the e-mails from my constituents are appalled and horrified that not only is this government giving themselves an increase, but they're doing it at this time of year.

I just want to set this in context. Today, the Ontario Workers Action Centre came to visit me in my office. I want to put this pay increase in context in terms of what other Ontarians are receiving this Christmas. First of all, they say, "A fair day's pay for a hard day's work?" "Not in Ontario. Not for the growing number of us pushed into jobs with low wages and lousy working conditions."

Let's talk about low wages. Almost 25% of Ontario workers are paid poverty wages of \$10 or less, but 31% of women and people of colour are found in these jobs. Wages stay low because the government keeps the legal minimum wage well below the poverty line. And where is my bill on the minimum wage? It's not being rushed through. It has gone through second reading, and we wait and we wait for the hearings on that bill and that that bill be seen in committee.

1720

"The government fails to enforce weak labour laws," they go on to say, "even though one in three employers violates our basic minimum labour standards"—one in three. "The government does little to protect workers. Fifty-nine million dollars of wages that the government ordered deadbeat bosses to pay workers went unpaid over the past three years. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Most employers don't get caught. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of employers found in violation of the law face no prosecution because we don't have enough employment standards officers to find them, catch them and prosecute them. Thirty-seven per cent of jobs are part-time casual or temporary with few, if any, employment rights. Employers are treating more workers as 'self-employed.' That's so they don't have to pay employment insurance, Canada pension or follow basic minimum wage and overtime laws. Big companies contract out work to smaller companies, letting them violate basic employment standards."

"In this new world of work," the Workers' Action Centre goes on to say, "outdated labour laws don't

protect workers. Ontario workers need a fair deal. Outdated labour laws and lack of enforcement are deliberate policies that trap people in poverty. But these policies can and should be changed." But are we changing them? No, we're not. What are we doing? Just before this holiday season, when all of our faiths ask us to be generous to the poorest among us, we're feathering our own nests, we're giving ourselves a raise.

I've listened to the descriptions that have been put forward about the work that we do here at the Legislature. We've been called good, worthwhile, intelligent, hard-working. We've been called brave, and this legislation to raise our salaries has been called brave. Mr. Speaker, I would ask you, there are a number of people in my constituency, and I'm sure in other constituencies, who should be described that way as well. I think, for example, of child care workers, elementary school teachers, social workers, paramedics. I think of the small business owners and retailers, and I think of artists who, by the way, make on average about \$27,000 a year, about the same as our raise—not our salary, but our raise.

I think of all of those groups of people who watch in horror as this piece of legislation takes priority over everything else at this time of year—over everything else. We're sitting in this House to discuss this piece of legislation, not pieces of legislation that might help the poorest among us. We're not talking about ending the national child supplement clawback that would give poor children about \$1,500 extra a year. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about, say, housing. There are 122,000 families waiting for housing in this province, 65,000 in the GTA alone. We're not talking about housing initiatives that we could sit and do overtime on. No, we're not talking about that. We're not talking about enforcing employment standards, as you heard the Workers' Action Centre call for. We're not talking about raising the minimum wage, as I've already said. We're not talking about any of that. We're talking about raising our own salaries, at what a time. I hope all of those watching at home get the symbolism of this, the symbolism that says whether you're Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Sikh or Christian, at this time of year we're not sharing our wealth with the poorest among us. No, what we're doing is we're giving ourselves a nice, fat raise.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the reasons, and you heard Mr. Hampton talk about them, but let's talk about the reason that we have qualified people, we need qualified people and that qualified people won't be attracted to this job unless we pay them the upper 5% of what anybody in Ontario makes. We should be insulted. My honourable colleagues and I should be insulted by that suggestion. Aren't we here out of a sense of duty and public service? Is that not what motivates us to stand here, to speak, to pass bills? Are we here for the money? Is that why we're here? I hope not. I hope we're not here for the money. You've heard my colleagues say that we would be happy with an increase that was reasonable. We would be delighted with a pension plan. Everyone needs a pension plan. But 31%, not to speak about the wonder-

ful little packages we get when we leave? A 31% raise just at this time of year, when we're called to be generous to the poorest amongst us?

It's interesting that, of course, in this cynical environment where we're only motivated by money and we're worth 75% of a federal colleague—I love that description. We're worth 75% of a federal colleague because we might be paid 75% as much. Is this what human endeavour has come down to? Is this what public policy and making public policy and serving the public has come down to? I used to be a United Church minister, and to all the pastors and priests who are working so hard at this time of year, I'd like them to know, if they are watching right now, that their work is worth nothing. Their work is worth nothing in terms of the McGuinty government. Why? Because they get paid very little. All the pastors and priests out there who are working so hard at this time of year, their work has no value in the province of Ontario, according to the McGuinty government, because they don't make a lot of money. They're not in the top 5% of all earners. They shouldn't be delighted by serving the public. They shouldn't be delighted by helping the poorest amongst them. No, because they don't make enough money, and after all, we measure human dignity by the amount of money we make. Is that so? Is that what this government is saying, that human dignity is measured by the amount of money you make? I think that's a very sad statement, especially at this time of year, when we are called to be generous to the poorest among us. We're all called to do that, no matter what our beliefs.

And then I want to deal with the very cynical, the most cynical suggestion of all, that, "Well, if we're not going to vote for this bill, if we don't agree with the 31% increase at this time of year, then all we should do is just opt out." My response to that is this, I'm not going to leave this money with this government; they'll only spend it on themselves. I'm going to take that money and give it to these people: Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, West End Angels, Second Harvest, Daily Bread, Saint Vincent's, St. Francis Table and the Redwood shelter. I'm going to take the increase from my paycheque and I'm going to document it for Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Watson. I'm going to take photos. There will be a photo-op every time I hand my cheque over, which I will deliver happily to all the members opposite in case they question my credibility. I'm going to say to them—

Interjections.

Ms. DiNovo: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that Mr. Wilkinson listen. I would ask that they listen. I know it's not a skill that's developed—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Parkdale–High Park, I can't make them listen. I can only try and make them be quiet when they don't listen.

Mr. Kormos: And they want more money.

Ms. DiNovo: Absolutely.

So it will be very transparent. You'll see exactly where my money is going, exactly where it's going, and I'll show you the photos. What I would suggest that this

government do if they want to keep pace with New Democrats on this is to give some of their money to those who make minimum wage by increasing the minimum wage, to give some of their money to those who are receiving Ontario Works and ODSP, who have been waiting for an increase, waiting for that 21.6% increase that they deserve. I challenge this government to give money to the housing projects.

Do you know what? Here is a very interesting thing for those people at home. If they just took the money that they are going to earmark for this increase, here are some of the things they could do with that money at this time of year for the poorest among us. They could build housing units, 100 to 200. Wouldn't that be a nice Christmas present or holiday present for a number of families of the 122,000 waiting for housing units?

They could go to those 13,500 children who are using food banks in the GTA and they could give that increase directly to those families. Wouldn't that be a nice present at this time of year? That's something you could do. They could take this money and start giving back the national child supplement that they claw back to some of the poorest. That's \$1,500 a year per child. That would be a wonderful thing for this government to do at this time of year.

1730

Again, what we're arguing for here is simply a rational response and a generous one of this government to the poorest among us at this time of year.

There, Mr. Speaker. I hope I've satisfied some of their concerns about all of this. I challenge them again to overcome their cynicism, to overcome their stance as the Grinch who stole Christmas, to overcome the desire to feather their own nests, to buy themselves new cars, to build a new wing on their houses. I would challenge each one of the government members opposite and our Tory colleagues to the side to do what we're all called to do at this time of year, and that is to think of those poorest among us and to be sitting here in this Legislature not talking about their own raise but talking about raises where they're absolutely needed the most.

Just to outline in case anybody missed it, a 25% increase to the minimum wage from \$8 to \$10—simply that; simply give back the national child supplement, simply end the clawback, \$1,500 a year per child; simply reform the tax base so that small business and retailers can actually enjoy their holidays as well; simply enforce the Employment Standards Act so that all of those employed out there in Ontario can actually get their paycheques, can actually be paid appropriately, can actually collect what they're duly owed, to simply do that.

Perhaps hire some new employment standards officers. That would make a lot of people happy and create some jobs at this Christmastime. Perhaps they could look at a lot of the housing issues that beset those who are poorest among us. Perhaps they could do what they promised and create \$300- to \$400-per-month units so that the poorest among us could live somewhere. Two

people a week will die on the streets of Toronto this winter. If other winters are any indication, that's what's going to happen: Two people a week will die. This is life and death that we're talking about here.

I challenge this government: Why don't you do something for them? After all, all our faiths teach that at this time of year we are to be generous with the poorest among us. People who have no place to live, who are about to die on the streets of our major city—surely they count as the poorest among us. Maybe we should take some of the time, which is so precious in this Legislature, we've heard, to actually focus on them. Maybe we should do that.

Perhaps we could look too at those people who make life worth living—the artists among us, the musicians, the filmmakers, the writers. They were all here in the members' galleries not too long ago, a week back or so. Maybe you could look at raising them out of poverty and doing something for the artists among us. After all, their average annual salary is about \$27,000, about the same as the raise we're all going to get. Maybe we should do something about status-of-the-artist legislation so that these artists can raise themselves out of poverty. These are the people who delight us and make our lives worth living. Maybe that would be a nice wish for this time of year, for people of faith, for people in this Legislature who want to do the right thing—not the selfish thing but the right thing. Maybe we should ask for that as well.

Maybe we should think about all of those people out there who do brave, honest, hard work, work that's just as brave, just as honest, just as hard as the work that we do here. I'm thinking of the social workers, the educators in our midst, those who work in the health services, the small business owners, the priests and pastors I spoke about who don't expect a huge salary to help others to do the hard, hard work that they're called to do, often from dawn to dusk. Maybe we should think about all of those people out there and work for something other than money, work for the joy of public service, work for the joy of actually being able to make those other people's lives just a little bit easier at this time of year. Maybe we should be a little bit less cynical, a little bit less grinch-like, a little bit less selfish, a little bit more generous with all of those out there in our constituencies, all of those sending us e-mails who are horrified and appalled at this waste of their money. Maybe what we should do is think of others, not of ourselves, at a time of year we're called to do exactly that: to think of others, not ourselves. I hope we do that.

My personal holiday wish—dare I say, my Christmas wish—is that all the members here stop to think just for a moment about the poorest among us and, instead of spending time here on how to give ourselves a raise, think about how to give them a raise in this season.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Levac: I accept the member from Parkdale–High Park's sermon. With respect, I reject that no member in this place thinks like she does.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I too want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for a very good presentation as it relates to the spirit of the season and the fact that we should all be doing what we can for the less fortunate in our society. Having said that, I don't believe that's really the issue in this bill, but I do thank her for the presentation.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I was expecting to hear more from my colleagues on behalf of the member from Parkdale–High Park. I listened to her with great interest, first of all, because she was very forceful and very articulate. It was easy for me to tell that she had come from being a minister to this House. She spoke very candidly and openly and honestly about her constituents, about the poverty that afflicts her community. She talked about the need to minister to poor people and about what all of the great religions have to teach us.

There are some here who will think that this is not a subject that should be conveyed in this particular Legislature, but I would beg to differ. Some of the great orators of our time, some of the great people who have stood up in this Legislature and in the House of Commons, have originally been people of the ministry, people who got drawn into politics to try to make a difference—not for everyone and certainly not for the rich, but for those who were most in need: the poor, the downtrodden. I think of all of those people and what she had to say here today, and I have to tell you that it hit home for me. It is the reality and the truth that she lives; it is the reality and the truth that she believes. And she believes it strongly enough to challenge the members opposite and to promise to do something that I think very few of us would do, and that is to lay bare our whole life and our whole financial situation and to lay bare where she is going to put that money. I commend her for what she has to say and I thank her for making her words and her deeds come from her heart.

Mr. Kormos: In two minutes' time, after the member for Parkdale–High Park has had a chance to give her two-minute response, we're going to be hearing from Shelley Martel, the member from Nickel Belt, who has invested a big chunk of her life in her work here at Queen's Park.

I join others in applauding and congratulating the member from Parkdale–High Park for putting this in perspective. Look, out there with the folks across Ontario, it's not the money; it's the attitude. It's the "Me first" that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals are expressing.

Walking back to the apartment on Thursday, I stopped in the supermarket; I'm going to tell you this story again. I was at the checkout counter and a woman 60 or 65 years old said to me, "Can you stop them?" I didn't know what she was talking about for a minute. I said, "Huh?" She said, "Can you stop the pay raise?" I said, "No, I don't think so. There are only nine of us. The government, with its majority, will impose it if they really want to." She said, "Look, I work here because I have to, because I've got to buy groceries. That's what my income

at \$7.75 an hour pays for.” And she said, “You know, they don’t even provide ballpoint pens. I’ve got to bring my own pen, like the other workers do.” She was hurt, frustrated, angry, disappointed. She felt that, at the very least, elected officials at Queen’s Park could have done something about her \$7.75-an-hour wage before they granted themselves a huge salary increase. Where, she thought, was all the collaborative effort when it came to increasing minimum wage—but we saw it oh, so obviously, when it came to increasing MPPs’ salaries.

So don’t answer to me; answer to the woman working at the checkout at that supermarket at \$7.75 an hour.

1740

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Parkdale–High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. DiNovo: I just wanted to respond to a couple of the queries and the challenges that I heard from members opposite. One of them was about the minimum wage, and I say, that would be a wonderful measure, that the government support a raise—it’s really catch-up; it’s not really a raise because, as I said, in 1972 it was \$2. That would be just under \$10 an hour right now. So a catch-up in minimum wage to \$10 an hour would be wonderful.

It would be wonderful if they stopped the clawback of the national child supplement.

It would be wonderful if we all acted in the spirit of Tommy Douglas, who was voted the greatest Canadian by CBC listeners across Canada. What Tommy always did with his raises was to donate them to charity.

I also reject the very cynical assertion by the Liberal government that people give to charities for the tax benefit. I challenge them all to denounce anyone who says that, particularly at this time of year, when charities go begging, literally, for donations and appeal to the most altruistic senses among us and to those who are generous. So please, don’t let us hear that again, that people give to charities simply for the tax benefits to themselves. That’s horrendous.

Again, all we’re asking here is time to think, as well that this bill go to committee, that people have a chance to give their input—this is a democracy, after all—that we hear from all of Ontario on this issue. And I can tell you what you will hear from all of Ontario on this issue. They will say what I say: At this time of year, to consider such a move is abhorrent to most Ontarians, and we ask that, at the very least, it go to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It’s a pleasure for me to participate in the debate today. I want to focus my remarks on, really, the contradiction on how suddenly this became a priority for the government when I think the government should have so many other different priorities, especially given what is happening in the province today.

I said in my two-minute response before, and I’ll just repeat it, that this 31% pay increase wasn’t a priority for the government less than a week ago. The Minister of Finance—who, I assume, represents the government; after all, he is the Minister of Finance—when asked if the Liberals had a plan to increase wages beyond CPI, said

the following: “It’s not something we’re looking at for the current time. We’ve got other issues to deal with.” I wish that were the case. But it is the case that this week we are dealing with the pay raise. He said that on December 7. Or, as recently as December 13, 2006, the government House leader, who has been here a long time and whom I have enormous respect for, told the Niagara Falls Review the following: “I don’t anticipate you’ll see any significant action on this ... at all.” A large “pay increase for MPPs is not going to happen.” That was the position of the Treasurer of the province of Ontario last week. It was the position of the government House leader last week. And here we are, with the session extended by a week, dealing with a bill that essentially provides MPPs with a 31% pay increase.

I think that Mr. Sorbara was right. I think the government had other priorities, had other issues to deal with. And I sincerely regret that we are not here to deal with these issues. Let me tell you and let me put on the record what I think some of those are. First of all, this government should fully end the clawback of the national child benefit. It is a disgrace that we are here talking about a significant pay-increase proposal at the same time as this government, in its fourth year of government, still has not ended the clawback of the national child benefit for the poorest families in Ontario. After all, this is what Dalton McGuinty had to say on July 31, 2003, when he sent this letter to June Callwood and Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld of the Campaign Against Child Poverty: “Poverty, and especially child poverty, is an issue we take very seriously. Taking concrete measures to eradicate it will remain a top priority for us, whether we are the official opposition or the government.”

He went on to say, “My team and I oppose the Conservative government’s practice of clawing back the national child benefit ... a practice we will end during our first mandate.”

I’ll bet June Callwood didn’t think the Premier meant “maybe by the end of the fourth year in government.” I’ll bet she didn’t think that at all. But here we are, with the government in its fourth year, and all this government has managed to do for the poorest families in Ontario is to give them the inflationary increase of this federal benefit.

I remind people who are watching and I remind members in this House that this isn’t provincial money; it’s federal money, for goodness’ sake, that is designed to take Ontario families out of poverty. And you claw it back from the poorest families in the province. You claw it back. You claw back \$250 million from these poorest families. That’s the track record on the national child benefit.

I get offended when I hear the government use the following excuse: They can’t end the benefit now because the federal money they claw back from those families is money that pays for other programs for kids. Do you know what? We all knew that before the government made the promise that it did, before Mr. McGuinty wrote this letter to June Callwood and said that we

oppose that clawback. We all knew where that money was going because reports were annually produced that showed where the money was going that the former Conservative government was clawing back and that you claw back from the poorest families.

Here's the 1999 Ontario municipal report, which lists, community by community, what programs are being funded through the NCB clawback. Here's the report for 2000, which lists, community by community, how much money that is clawed back from the poorest families is going to different organizations in the province, run through the municipalities. It was no surprise and no secret that that's what the money was used for. We all knew that. It is offensive for this government to stand in its place and defend the ongoing practice started by the Conservatives, continued under the Liberals, to claw that money back from the poorest of the poor and say, "We can't do otherwise because municipalities rely on that money to provide programs at the local level." Dalton McGuinty knew that when he made the promise, and it is indefensible to use that as an excuse today.

I've got to give credit to the Sudbury and District Health Unit, because in May 2006, after the budget, they sent this letter to the Premier:

"In the budget speech of 2006, the government of Ontario indicated that it is interested in increasing opportunities for every Ontarian—"every" highlighted. "Related to this goal, the Sudbury and District Board of Health at its April 20 meeting passed the following motion:

"Whereas the number of clients with low incomes served by the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program is significant; approximately 5,000 Sudbury-area families (11%) lived in poverty in the year 2000; and the proportion of Ontario children in low-income families was about 12.9% in 2004; and

"Whereas, in the 2006 provincial budget speech, Premier McGuinty did not end the clawback of the national child benefit ... given to each province to distribute to children in low-income families; and

"Whereas families receiving social assistance will only receive the federal government's increases to the national child benefit supplement, (about \$20 per month ...), but continue to miss out on about \$100 per child per month;

"Therefore, be it resolved that Premier McGuinty identify child and family poverty as a health issue that should be addressed; and

"Further, that the McGuinty government fully end the clawback of the NCBS, so that families receiving social assistance receive the full amount allocated per child, while resources are maintained for existing early childhood support programs which are funded through the clawback."

1750

Good for the Sudbury and District Health Unit; good for the other municipalities across Ontario that have written to this government and said, "End the clawback now."

I regret that as we sit this week, we are not dealing with a policy issue that would fully end the clawback and do it now. No, we are here dealing with a proposal for an extremely significant pay increase at the same time that the government can't find the financial wherewithal to end the clawback from the poorest families in the province.

Why isn't it a priority for the government to live up to the election promise it made with respect to those seniors who are in long-term-care homes? The government said, during the last election, "Invest in better nursing home care, providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident." In the fourth year of the McGuinty Liberal government, we're nowhere near having the government put that kind of money on the table to deal with some of the most vulnerable seniors in our province, those who live in long-term-care homes.

This is what the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors had to say after the last budget: "Over the last three budgets, the Liberal government has raised the amount of annual funding going directly to care by about \$2,000 per resident. This compares to a promised increase of \$6,000—a promise made by the Liberals during the last provincial election.

"The Liberals told us that seniors' issues, and long-term care in particular, were priorities. Why then wasn't this an important item in the budget?" said Donna Rubin, CEO of OANHSS.

"OANHSS estimates that the funding shortfall in the sector is now \$450 million a year." The release went on to say, "Unless the funding shortfall is addressed, the level of care will continue to be inadequate. For example:

"—Residents now receive about two hours of nursing and personal care over a 24-hour period. OANHSS believes that this level is unacceptable and should be closer to at least three hours."

Point 2: "Homes are not able to provide anywhere near the level of rehabilitation and restorative care that residents need."

Point 3: "Only a small fraction of residents currently receive professional mental health services, even though 65% have Alzheimer disease or some other form of dementia.

"Other groups and organizations across the province have also been calling on Queen's Park to keep its \$6,000 promise. These have included:

"—municipal governments such as: the regions of York, Peel, and Waterloo; the cities of North Bay and Windsor; and the counties of Brant, Dufferin, Essex, Frontenac, Grey, Lambton, Renfrew, and Simcoe....

"—a number of seniors groups, including: Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils, Ontario Society (Coalition) of Senior Citizens' Organizations, and the United Senior Citizens of Ontario Inc."

All of these organizations, many of whom represent some of the most frail and elderly who live in long-term-care homes, know that this government is about one third

of the way to meeting its election commitment in the fourth year of the government. They know that this government experienced a \$3-billion windfall in the last budget in March 2006, yet the government can't seem to find the funding necessary to meet the election promise that it made to families and residents in long-term-care homes. Not only can they not meet the financial commitment, they now don't want to meet the promise they made of reinstating the minimum standard of hands-on care of 2.25 hours of care per resident per day.

I think that should be a priority for this government to deal with. If we're going to be sitting here this week, maybe we should be addressing that election promise and ask the government why they can't seem to find the money to meet the \$6,000-per-resident promise but seem to have money available for a very substantial pay raise for MPPs who, as we've already heard, are already in the top 10%, in terms of income bracket, in the province of Ontario.

If the government wanted to look at priorities, they could look at the priority of getting rid of the waiting list for children who have autism, who need intensive behavioural intervention, because it is under this Liberal government that that wait list has grown exponentially. There were 89 children on the wait list for IBI treatment after the first six months that these Liberals were in office—89 on the wait list for IBI. By March 31, 2005, the list of autistic kids waiting for IBI treatment was 399. By March 31, 2006, 753 children had been assessed as eligible for IBI and are languishing on a waiting list, praying for service. And meanwhile, some of their families are going broke trying to finance what is a very expensive treatment. Some other families don't have the financial wherewithal at all to even consider trying to put in place a program for IBI for their children as they wait on that list and don't get services.

So many of these kids, if they received this treatment in a timely fashion, would experience such a tremendous difference in their lives. In the last four years that I've had the privilege of working with a number of these families, I have seen the enormous difference this treatment makes for these children. That has made a difference even after they were six, even though there are some ministers in this government who try to say otherwise. In fact, many of the families I dealt with were only able to provide IBI, because of their financial circumstance, after their kids turned six, and still those children made enormous gains.

This is a government that watches kids languish on a waiting list for IBI. It's a government that has spent millions of dollars fighting these families in court. Do you know that for the last 18 months I have been trying to get, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, the amount of money that has been spent by the government fighting these families in court—over 18 months now. It started as an order paper question, then started at freedom of information, then went to mediation, now is at arbitration, and we are waiting for a ruling from an arbitrator as to whether or not some of this information is going to be

disclosed. And I have no doubt that the reason this government has fought me every step of the way from getting that information is because it will show that millions, literally millions, of dollars were spent, first by the Conservative government and then by the McGuinty Liberal government, to fight the Deskin and Wynberg families in court.

Not only have they fought those families in court, but this government has also spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting a whole group of other families, over a hundred in total, before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has, in its findings, said very clearly that this government, in the case of Luke Burrows, who is the first child whose complaint was heard, indeed discriminated against Luke Burrows on the basis of his age and disability when they cut off his IBI treatment when he turned six. That happened under the Conservatives. That case is still going on at the Human Rights Tribunal today under the Liberals. And most days, when the tribunal sits, the government has no less than four lawyers—four lawyers—from the Attorney General's office sitting at the tribunal.

I can't imagine what the cost of that is, just for the tribunal hearings alone. And hopefully, after I get information about how much the court case cost, I'll then be able to use that decision from the arbitrator to find out how much both governments—first the Conservatives, then the Liberals—have spent trying to block families at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

We have 753 kids on a waiting list right now. They've qualified for service. They can't get it. You've got families who are going into financial ruin trying to pay for IBI: second mortgages, fundraisers, borrowing from family, doing whatever it takes to try to pay for a program for their kids while they wait for government funding. Most families who have autistic children and are languishing on the waiting list can't even afford to do that.

I would have hoped, since this government made very specific promises to families who have kids with autism in the last election—very specific promises about ending this discrimination, about funding IBI, about making sure that IBI was provided in schools, which it still is not—that we could have used this week and dealt with that as a government priority, because I've got to tell you, as someone who has worked with these families for a long time, that it really is a priority, and it is a shame that we haven't dealt with it as a priority yet.

There are many other issues that we could have been dealing with this week; there are many other issues that I could raise that I think should involve the government in terms of priorities. I don't have to go again into the whole minimum wage, but if you want to talk about people really working hard, I'll tell you, the people who really work hard in the province of Ontario are those people who are working on the minimum wage, full-time, and still live in poverty, still live under the poverty line. Those are folks who are working hard, and the little

that this government is prepared to do for them, which still won't get them out of poverty, is a disgrace for all of us. It is a shame for all of us that the people who are working the hardest, struggling on the minimum wage and still living in poverty, can't expect a living wage in the province of Ontario in the year 2006. That should be a priority that we're dealing with here today.

I just want to close by saying we need to take this in context. I don't think the general public would bat an eye at all if we were looking at a 3% or 4% increase, even if we did that over a couple of years, to move the pay up. But I don't believe that most of the public can accept a 30% increase in one fell swoop for a group of folks who,

frankly, aren't doing that badly at all. We are in the top 10% of income earners in the province, and I don't believe for a moment that in order to attract good candidates, we have to increase that pay to keep people in Ontario. If that were the case, then all those other Legislatures would be empty of MPPs now, because they all would have run to the federal government.

I don't accept this pay increase. I think it's—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1803.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

CONTENTS

Monday 18 December 2006

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Highway 6	
Mr. Arnott.....	6985
Darren Coogan	
Mr. Dhillon.....	6985
Christmas tree lighting ceremony	
Mr. Yakabuski.....	6985
National child benefit supplement	
Mr. Prue.....	6986
Ontario youth apprenticeship program	
Mr. McNeely.....	6986
Dress the Part	
Mrs. Elliott.....	6986
HIV/AIDS in Africa	
Mr. Levac.....	6987
Ambulance services	
Mr. Zimmer.....	6987
Rural Ontario	
Mr. Parsons.....	6987

FIRST READINGS

Municipal Amendment Act (By-laws re Absentee Landlords), 2006, Bill 176, Mr. Tabuns	
Agreed to.....	6988
Mr. Tabuns.....	6988

MOTIONS

Private members' public business	
Ms. Wynne.....	6988
Agreed to.....	6988
House sittings	
Ms. Wynne.....	6988
Agreed to.....	6988

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government advertising	
Mr. Runciman.....	6989
Mr. McGuinty.....	6989
Native land dispute	
Mr. Miller.....	6990
Mr. Ramsay.....	6990
Hydro operations	
Mr. Hampton.....	6991, 6992
Mr. Duncan.....	6991, 6997
Mr. McGuinty.....	6992
Mr. Yakabuski.....	6996
Health premiums	
Mr. Runciman.....	6993
Mr. Sorbara.....	6993

School boards

Mr. Marchese.....	6993
Ms. Wynne.....	6993

Municipal finances

Ms. Marsales.....	6994
Mr. Sorbara.....	6994

Landfill

Mr. Miller.....	6994
Ms. Broten.....	6995

Health care

Ms. Martel.....	6995
Mr. Smitherman.....	6995

Education

Mr. Milloy.....	6996
Ms. Wynne.....	6996

Paper mill

Mr. Bisson.....	6997
Mr. Ramsay.....	6997

Fair access to professions

Mr. Fonseca.....	6998
Mr. Colle.....	6998

PETITIONS

Macular degeneration

Mr. Dunlop.....	6998
Mr. Balkissoon.....	7001

Centennial of Stanley Cup championship

Mr. Hampton.....	6999
------------------	------

Child custody

Mr. Delaney.....	6999
------------------	------

Landfill

Mr. Sterling.....	6999
-------------------	------

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Ms. Horwath.....	7000
------------------	------

Education funding

Mr. Ruprecht.....	7000
-------------------	------

Frederick Banting homestead

Mr. Wilson.....	7000
-----------------	------

Long-term care

Mr. Kormos.....	7000
Ms. Martel.....	7001

Pedestrian walkway

Mr. Miller.....	7001
-----------------	------

Fair access to professions

Mr. Ruprecht.....	7001
-------------------	------

SECOND READINGS

Electoral System

Referendum Act, 2006, Bill 155, Mrs. Bountrogianni	
Agreed to.....	6989

Legislative Assembly Statute Law

Amendment Act, 2006, Bill 173,

Mrs. Bountrogianni

Mrs. Bountrogianni.....	7002, 7004
Ms. DiNovo.....	7003, 7014, 7018
Mr. Levac.....	7003, 7006, 7013, 7017
Mr. Sterling.....	7003, 7004, 7007
Mr. Bisson.....	7003
Mr. Kormos.....	7006, 7013, 7017
Ms. Martel.....	7006, 7014, 7018
Mr. Hampton.....	7007, 7014
Mr. Watson.....	7013
Mr. Hardeman.....	7017
Mr. Prue.....	7017
Debate deemed adjourned.....	7021

OTHER BUSINESS

Answers to written questions

Mr. Runciman.....	6989
Mr. Levac.....	6989

Visitor

Mr. Mauro.....	6989
----------------	------

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 18 décembre 2006

DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Programme d'apprentissage pour les jeunes de l'Ontario

M. McNeely.....	6986
-----------------	------

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2006 modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités (règlements municipaux concernant les locateurs absents), projet de loi 176, M. Tabuns

Adoptée.....	6988
--------------	------

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2006 sur le référendum relatif au système électoral,

projet de loi 155, M ^{me} Bountrogianni	
Adoptée.....	6989

Loi de 2006 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne l'Assemblée législative, projet de loi 173, M^{me} Bountrogianni

M ^{me} Bountrogianni.....	7002
M. Bisson.....	7003
Débat présumé ajourné.....	7021