

No. 144A



N° 144A

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly  
of Ontario  
Second Session, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Assemblée législative  
de l'Ontario  
Deuxième session, 38<sup>e</sup> législature

**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Wednesday 21 March 2007**

**Mercredi 21 mars 2007**

Speaker  
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président  
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Acting Clerk  
Deborah Deller

Greffière par intérim  
Deborah Deller

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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

Wednesday 21 March 2007

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 mars 2007

*The House met at 1330.  
Prayers.*

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

**Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington):** People in Waterloo–Wellington and Halton Hills know that the McGuinty Liberal government's record is one of broken promises, weak leadership and misplaced priorities. It is a fact that Dalton McGuinty is spending at least \$20 billion a year more than when he came into office three and a half years ago.

In spite of this spending spree, the communities I represent are not receiving the financial support they need from the province for vital infrastructure projects. The towns of Minto and Halton Hills are asking that municipalities which have been shut out of three rounds of COMRIF funding be compensated for the costs of their applications. They make a good point, and as of this morning 99 municipalities had passed resolutions in agreement.

While at the ROMA-Good Roads conference three weeks ago, I heard from many local councillors. For example, the township of Centre Wellington has 104 bridges, and a third of them need work now. They also need help with their Elora water pollution control plant expansion. Recently, I heard from the county of Wellington, the region of Halton, the township of Puslinch and the town of Erin on their transportation needs, and they are showing leadership and vision that the McGuinty government is not. Soon the House will hear more from me on that.

When it comes to recreation projects so important to our quality of life, health and wellness, communities like Elmira, Mount Forest and Acton have received short shrift from this government when they needed provincial support.

This government wasted \$400 million to expand the Windsor casino and entice more people to gamble there. That is money that should have been spent on rural infrastructure projects or any number of other, more pressing priorities. Let's hope that tomorrow's budget responds to the needs of the people of Ontario.

#### NOWRUZ

**Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale):** Willowdale has one of the largest and most vibrant Iranian communities

in Canada. Today marks the first day of spring on the Iranian and Canadian calendars. In Farsi, one welcomes this holiday by saying "Nowruz Mobarak," or "Happy New Year." The word "Nowruz" means "new day" and has become a symbol of renewal, hope and prosperity for nearly 100,000 Iranians here in Ontario.

Iranian Canadians are an integral part of this province, especially in Willowdale, where they enrich the professional and social landscape of the riding. I'm honoured by the many invitations I have received to celebrate this holiday. In particular, I would like to thank the parents, children and staff at Zange Gheseh for inviting me to their wonderful 16th annual Persian new year performance under the direction of Mrs. Pary Missaghi. This event celebrated Persian dance, theatre and music. Events like these are special because they expose us to diverse traditions found in our multicultural society. I want to thank the Iranian community for their invitation to Canadians from all cultures and all beliefs to take part in their celebrations.

#### HUNTLEY CENTENNIAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

**Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton):** Tomorrow night, I will be at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board to speak in support of a motion to expand Huntley Centennial Public School in Carp.

On February 7, I toured the school with local trustee Lynn Scott and parent Tracey Brown. The need for an expansion is obvious. Huntley Centennial currently has an enrolment of 555 students in a building which should have a maximum of 360 students. This year, the school has nine portables, and next year, when the 20-student cap is in place up to grade 3, the school will need 15 portables. Quite frankly, there's not enough space on the existing site to place the additional six portables.

This school is already overcrowded, and with new subdivisions planned in the community, Huntley Centennial desperately needs an addition. Today I call on the McGuinty government to provide the necessary funding to help overcrowded schools accommodate the additional classes created at least in part by the 20-student cap. I ask that Huntley Centennial in Carp be one of the first to be given consideration for that much-needed funding.

#### MINIMUM WAGE

**Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston):** York South–Weston has the second-lowest average household

income of all ridings in our province. Indeed, the average household income is barely more than the hefty \$40,000 pay hike the Premier gave himself four days before Christmas.

Thousands of my constituents struggle mightily each and every day to make ends meet. Newcomers labour at two and three minimum-wage-paying jobs just to be able to cover the rent and put food on the table. Single mothers struggle to afford the cost of basics for their kids, basics like winter coats and boots. Young people cram as many hours of part-time work as they can into their hectic schedules in order to keep up with the escalating cost of post-secondary education.

These constituents deserve a real raise, not next year or the year after or the year after that; they deserve a real raise today. That's why I'm calling for a \$10 minimum wage now. It's about fairness for the lowest-paid working Ontarians. A couple of days after my by-election victory, the Premier's sidekick, the Minister of Finance, audaciously declared, while licking his electoral wounds, that poverty was now his issue. Well, where I come from, talk is dirt cheap.

Tomorrow, the minister has an opportunity to rise above his own rhetoric. He can walk the walk and deliver a \$10 minimum wage now. Sadly, if today's headlines are correct, he won't. Instead, he'll deliver measly crumbs for the working poor: nickels and dimes here, quarters there, maybe a whole dollar in three or four years' time. All the while, the working poor will fall further and further behind as the minister laughs all the way to the bank each and every month to cash his raise.

#### ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

**Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre):** Today, March 21, is not only the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination but also a historic day in the history of Ontario and the British Empire: 214 years ago today, on March 21, 1793, our culture of human rights and freedoms and our possibilities for racial reconciliation were advanced.

On this day in 1793, the voice of Chloe Cooley was heard resisting bondage as she was dragged from Canada across the Niagara River to be sold. As a result, John Graves Simcoe, first Lieutenant Governor of the newly incorporated province of Upper Canada, responded to the call of Chloe Cooley by championing the first anti-slavery legislation in the British Empire. In the first sitting of the first Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada, the anti-slave-trade bill passed in the Legislative Assembly on July 9, 1793. It predates the British Parliament's 1807 abolishment of the slave trade by 14 years and gives Ontario the distinction of being the first in the British Empire to abolish the slave trade, thus leading the way for a more civilized world. It opened the way for the underground railway refugees to follow the North Star in the quest for freedom in our province.

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On the same day in 1960, of course, we all recall what happened in Sharpeville, South Africa. Police opened fire

and killed 69 students protesting against apartheid laws adopted by the South African government.

March 21 has been recognized by the United Nations as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Let us note this historic day and honour the legacy of Chloe Cooley, John Graves Simcoe and other 18th-century human rights, anti-slavery and anti-racism pioneers from this province and the students of Sharpeville in South Africa.

#### CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton):** It's hard to follow that, but tomorrow is budget day in Ontario, and as the official opposition critic for children and youth, I'm hoping there will finally be good news in this budget for children's mental health issues. For far too long, children's mental health issues have been ignored in this province. Of particular concern: Children's mental health has been the subject of systemic underfunding and, of course, stigma.

The children's mental health community is doing what they can on limited resources. In this Legislature, the official opposition has raised the \$3 million the McGuinty Liberals are cutting from health care and children's mental health in Durham region. I am told that over 300 people went out to protest that cut last night—and the ongoing crisis, of course, in military communities right across this province, where the minister herself is not helping kids in crisis on those military bases.

The federal government gets this. They know that children's mental health in Ontario needs an immediate budget increase. I'm calling on the McGuinty government to give \$40 million in this budget so we can spend more money on serving kids, on prevention and intervention, and have more stable and long-term funding. As I said, the federal government gets it. That's why they have developed a national commission to address children's mental health right across this country, with \$10 million over the first two years and \$15 million each year after that. About one in six children across Canada suffers from mental illness. If undetected and untreated early, it can develop into a chronic problem.

Today, I call on the members opposite, the McGuinty Liberal government, to do the right thing: Follow the lead of the federal government and—

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

#### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans):** On March 6, I had the pleasure of welcoming the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to Ottawa–Orléans for an important education announcement. We announced that \$1.2 million would be invested to provide Ontarians living in underserved communities with better access to post-secondary education.

The funding will be used to expand the award-winning Contact North program, a distance-education training network, by building five new educational access centres in southern and eastern Ontario. These access centres will allow students to attend virtual classes at different universities, colleges and school boards in southern Ontario via audioconferencing, videoconferencing and e-learning technologies. I'm very proud to announce that one of these centres will be built at Cairine Wilson Secondary School in Ottawa–Orléans.

By incorporating this educational service centre into a high school, we are expanding the career choices of local high school students who want to earn dual credits and develop their skills. This in turn will keep more students in school until they graduate by providing them with more choices that appeal to them. It will also increase the employability of these students after they graduate, because knowledge of technical subjects and trades will be in high demand in our increasingly technical world.

This announcement builds on our government's ambitious plans to revitalize the education system and ensure Ontarians are receiving the best education possible. I would like to thank the minister for making this initiative possible and for travelling all the way to my riding of Ottawa–Orléans to participate in a very exciting announcement. Thanks to Minister Bentley and his hard-working staff, Ontarians are well on their way to becoming the most skilled and knowledgeable workers in the world.

#### HEALTH CARE FUNDING

**Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce):** More good news for the riding of Huron–Bruce: In late February, we had the pleasure of having the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable George Smitherman, in my riding to make announcements to the communities of Exeter and Kincardine. They will provide \$1.75 million in funding to cover hospital redevelopment costs and to help provide better access to health care for the residents of both areas.

Of this funding, the South Huron Hospital Association emergency department in Exeter received a \$1-million investment from the province that will go towards the renovation of the existing facility. The central focus of these renovations is to improve the comfort, efficiency and safety of the hospital's emergency care by modernizing and reorganizing the emergency department to improve patient flow, further improving health and safety standards. There will also be a portion of the funding allocated toward upgrading the ventilation system.

The South Bruce Grey Health Centre in Kincardine also received funding, in the amount of \$750,000. That will go toward the preplanning for renovations and expansion of an aging facility, including increasing the hospital's capacity for emergency and ambulatory care. Kincardine continues to be an area of high growth, and these additional dollars will go a long way to providing residents of the community with improved access to health care at the facility.

The McGuinty government is dedicated to strengthening our health care system in rural communities across Ontario.

#### CITY OF CORNWALL

**Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh):** On February 17 of this year, the Ottawa Citizen ran a story that indicated that Cornwall can serve as a model for other communities, demonstrating what to do upon the loss of a key employer. The article highlights the Cornwall comeback story and explains how the city has started to diversify its economy to compensate for the recent loss of businesses like Domtar.

Cornwall has welcomed new employers such as the Wal-Mart distribution centre, which has seen continuous expansions in recent years, and Teleperformance Canada. It has seen the creation of new small businesses like restaurants such as Schnitzels, Athens and The Sports Page on the Pitt Street promenade. The year 2006 served as a banner year for construction, and the services sector has also seen outstanding growth.

The citizens of Cornwall as well as communities like Chesterville and Iroquois have continuously demonstrated their willingness to create opportunities for themselves. This government has been a willing partner in helping these rural communities in this time of transition. We have acted on this front, investing millions of dollars in infrastructure, training programs, health care, culture, and many other sectors.

There are great opportunities available in Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, and these are increasingly being recognized across the province and beyond. I encourage families and businesses to look to the east for places to set up new facilities and to make a home.

#### VISITOR

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to introduce someone well known to many here who is in attendance today: Susan Gapka, who is one of our noted trans-activists in the community. Welcome, Susan.

**The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown):** I would like to bring to the attention of the members that we are having some technical difficulties with the antique clock at the opposite end of the chamber, so you may find a discrepancy between the digital clocks on the wall and the one at the far end. The ones on the wall and the ones on your wrists will be the ones that rule.

#### REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

##### STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

**The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown):** Pursuant to standing order 62(c), the supplementary estimates,

2006-07, of the Office of the Assembly before the standing committee on estimates are reported back to the House, as they were not selected by the committee for consideration, and are deemed to be received and concurred in.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### CONDOMINIUM AMENDMENT ACT, 2007 LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CONDOMINIUMS

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur les condominiums.

**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. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina):** Several amendments are made to the Condominium Act, 1998. The act is amended to require that every declaration contain the standard provisions set out in the regulations. A review board is established under part XIII.1. The review board's objects include advising the public on matters relating to condominiums, assisting in resolving disputes and providing information to condominium corporations and owners of condominium units on matters of concern to them. The bill provides that an administrator for a corporation be appointed by the review board, and a duty of fair dealing is imposed on all declarants and condominium corporations in their dealings with owners and purchasers of condominium units.

1350

### TOBY'S ACT (RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF GENDER IDENTITY), 2007 LOI TOBY DE 2007 SUR LE DROIT À L'ABSENCE DE DISCRIMINATION FONDÉE SUR L'IDENTITÉ DE GENRE

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code respecting gender identity / Projet de loi 186, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui concerne l'identité de genre.

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

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park):** Toby's Act is named after one of Canada's great musicians. Toby Dancer was a producer of Ian Tyson albums, a

studio musician and a transsexual. This bill adds two words to the Human Rights Code, "gender identity," so that people who are transsexual or transgender can be protected along with their lesbian, gay and bisexual brothers and sisters. Currently, as Barbara Hall has attested in the Toronto Star, this protection is not extended to them, despite the abuse, oppression and discrimination the trans community has faced. We want to change that and ask that this bill be made law by this government immediately, before another life in that community is lost. In honour of the life that was Toby Dancer's.

## MOTIONS

### HOUSE SITTINGS

**Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader):** I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, for the purpose of considering government business.

**The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown):** Mr. Bradley has moved government motion number 271. 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 1353 to 1358.*

**The Speaker:** Members please take their seats. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

### Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Balkissoon, Bas	Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldeep	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

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

### Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Ouellette, Jerry J.
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Ferreira, Paul	Martel, Shelley	Runciman, Robert W.
Hardeman, Ernie	Martiniuk, Gerry	Savoline, Joyce
Hudak, Tim	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Klees, Frank	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

**The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):** The ayes are 48; the nays are 21.

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

#### VISITORS

**Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With us in the members' gallery today we have York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, Councillor Harold Usher from the city of London, Mary Williamson from the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, and Dr. Jean Augustine and members of the Ontario Bicentenary Commemorative Committee on the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

**Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We're also joined by two other quite wonderful people from the city of London today. I'd like to introduce Stephanie Shreve, the diversity officer with the London police department, and Don McKinnon, who is head of the hate crimes unit there. Welcome.

#### ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

##### ABOLITION DU COMMERCE DES ESCLAVES

**Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader):** I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807, and for each party to be allowed to speak to the motion for up to five minutes, following which the question shall be put on the motion without debate or amendment.

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

**Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** I move, on behalf of the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses:

Be it resolved:

That the Legislative Assembly recognizes that the 25th of March, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the passage by the British Parliament of An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807;

To acknowledge that this trade in human beings was an affront to the core values of our society, to our sense of justice and our reverence for human dignity and freedom;

To acknowledge that the slave trade and slavery is at the historical root of and has contributed to the social and economic inequality that continues to affect people of African descent;

To acknowledge that this legislation contributed greatly to the passage in 1834 of the first act to abolish slavery through the British Empire;

To honour the memory of those who suffered and died as a result of slavery or resisting enslavement and those who fought for its abolition in Ontario and around the world;

To recall with sorrow that slavery was practised on Ontario's soil;

To recall that in 1793—a mere two years after its establishment—Upper Canada, as Ontario was then known, passed An Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves, and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province, and that this act was the first to limit slavery in the British Empire, although it did not end enslavement;

To recall also with pride the role that Ontarians later played in the Underground Railroad, which was an operation roughly from 1815 to 1865, and the courage of those who helped enslaved Africans escape from the United States to freedom in our province; and

To acknowledge that this day has been designated by United Nations as the international day for the commemoration of this event,

The Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, on behalf of the people of Ontario,

Joins Parliaments and governments around the world in marking this event of global historic significance;

Condemns racism and reaffirms our belief in diversity, inclusion and equality; and

Condemns bonded labour and any and all forms of slavery and human trafficking that continue to exist under various guises around the world today.

Today is—

**The Speaker:** One moment.

Mr. Colle has moved,

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognizes that the 25th of March, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the passage by the British Parliament of An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807;

“To acknowledge that this trade in human beings was an affront to the core values of our society, to our sense of justice and our reverence for human dignity and freedom;

“To acknowledge that the slave trade and slavery is at the historical root of and has contributed to the social and economic inequality that continues to affect people of African descent;

“To acknowledge that this legislation contributed greatly to the passage in 1834 of the first act to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire;

“To honour the memory of those who suffered and died as a result of slavery or resisting enslavement and those who fought for its abolition in Ontario and around the world;

“To recall with sorrow that slavery was practised on Ontario's soil;

“To recall that in 1793—a mere two years after its establishment—Upper Canada, as Ontario was then known, passed An Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves, and to limit the term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province, and that this act was the first to

limit slavery in the British Empire, although it did not end enslavement;

“To recall also with pride the role that Ontarians later played in the Underground Railroad, which was in operation roughly from 1815 to 1865, and the courage of those who helped enslaved Africans escape from the United States to freedom in our province; and

“To acknowledge that this day has been designated by the United Nations as the international day for the commemoration of this event,

“The Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, on behalf of the people of Ontario,

Joins Parliaments and governments around the world in marking this event of global historic significance;

“Condemns racism and reaffirms our belief in diversity, inclusion and equality; and

“Condemns bonded labour and any and all forms of slavery and human trafficking that continue to exist under various guises around the world today.”

**Hon. Mr. Colle:** Today is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, so it is fitting that members join in unanimous support of efforts to combat racism.

J’invite tous les députés à donner avec moi leur appui entier à la lutte contre le racisme.

In the early 1500s, in the contest to build empires, the evil practice of kidnapping and enslaving African men, women and children began. A vile period in history for more than 300 years, the systemic destruction of families, communities and societies was institutionalized and accepted in the name of economic gain.

March 25 is the 200th anniversary of the passage of the law that abolished the transatlantic slave trade in the British Empire. William Wilberforce introduced the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which prohibited British ships from transporting and trafficking Africans for the purpose of slavery.

In the spirit of last year’s United Nations resolution which called for the global commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, our government is marking this bicentenary with year-long projects. Ontario joins Nova Scotia, Britain, Ireland, Scotland, Ghana, Jamaica, St. Vincent, the US Virgin Islands and Trinidad and Tobago in commemorating this anniversary.

Ontario’s aim is to remember, educate and commemorate the history of slavery and its abolition in our province. It is a part of Canada’s untold history. C’est un chapitre peu connu de l’histoire du Canada.

**1410**

On this very day in 1793, a presentation was made to the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, and other members of the executive council that would eventually lead to groundbreaking legislation and the first steps towards the abolition of slavery. In 1793, a full 14 years before the 1807 British law, Simcoe passed legislation that limited the introduction of slaves into Upper Canada after Chloe Cooley, a slave, resisted being bound and taken by force to New York state for sale.

Other courageous Ontarians, like Mary Ann Shadd, Henry Bibb, Lucie and Thornton Blackburn and Reverend Josiah Henson, played a role in Ontario’s abolition movement.

In 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act did not end slavery, but it sent a strong signal that its end was near. To recognize this defining moment in our history, our government has created the Ontario Bicentennial Commemorative Committee on the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. The committee consists of individuals from academia, historical societies, archivists, the arts and the African-Canadian community. It will help to motivate action across the cultural, faith and community sectors to ensure that the bicentenary creates a lasting impact. From Buxton to Ottawa, from Niagara Falls to Owen Sound, communities across Ontario will be engaged.

Up to \$1 million will support commemorative projects that tell Ontario’s story of slavery and honour those who fought to end it.

I would like to acknowledge the committee members who are with us today in the gallery, and I would also like to acknowledge the students from Carleton Village Public School and Brookview Middle School who have joined us today on this historic occasion.

In closing, I would like to quote Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, on the importance of commemorating the bicentenary. She said:

“The bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act is important to Canadians because it reminds us of the legacy of slavery in Canada and of the efforts that citizens continue to display every day to build a more just and equitable society. We all have much to learn from these heroes—slaves, lawmakers, community and religious leaders, and ordinary citizens—who dared to dream of a better world. And by their audacity, they helped put an end to one of the most barbaric chapters in our history.”

**Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges):** It is my privilege on behalf of John Tory and the Ontario PC caucus to join in the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the passage into law of the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill passed by the British Parliament on March 25, 1807, and to express our support for the motion before the House.

It is fitting that we make this commemoration on the international day for the elimination of racism, since the act of 1807 constituted an important first step in the process to combat racism effectively, a process that is ongoing and continues today.

By way of historical background, it was in February 1806 that Lord Grenville, in a passionate speech before the House of Lords, argued that the slave trade was contrary to the principles of justice, humanity and sound policy. He criticized his fellow members for not having abolished the trade long ago. Thereafter, the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament. The group of anti-slavery parliamentarians responsible for this historic act was led by the great



abolitionist and member of Parliament William Wilberforce. Wilberforce committed himself to such causes as the promotion of public education and parliamentary reform, but, above all, his fame rests upon his persistent, uncompromising and single-minded crusade for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. He died one month before Parliament put an end to slavery in the British dominions on August 1, 1834, which, as we know, is known as Emancipation Day.

His immediate influence was not limited to Britain alone. John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, was deeply inspired by his words and his example, so much so that in 1793, when this House came into existence at Newark, Simcoe ensured that the first bills on the order of business tabled attacked the pernicious institution of slavery in Upper Canada, almost 15 years before the act of 1807. Simcoe's efforts strengthened the resolve of Britain to finally end the enslavement of Africans in Canada and indeed throughout the British dominions on August 1, 1834.

For African-American slaves fleeing northward to Canada and to freedom, it was the Underground Railroad that became their lifeline. One of its famous conductors was Harriet Ross Tubman, who personally helped free hundreds of slaves, earning her the nickname Moses. In 1863, Harriet Tubman led an expedition during which nearly 800 slaves were brought to safety and freedom. As she liked to say, "We act up to the light we have." Today, we celebrate her as a person who made it her life's business indeed to "live up to the light" that she had.

The struggle against the slavery of Africans and racial discrimination was furthered by the life work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In the words of Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, president of the Ontario Black History Society, "Martin Luther King has come to be a symbol of freedom, social justice and equality in the world."

I would like to take this opportunity to gratefully recognize Dr. Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society for its tireless work in promoting African heritage and culture and especially Ontario Black History Month for the past three decades.

In honour of the 200th anniversary of the act of 1807, I tabled my private member's bill to proclaim Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Ontario, and I ask all members to give it their full support when it comes before the House.

In commemorating the 200th anniversary of the act of 1807, we mark a historic milestone in the ongoing struggle against racism and racial discrimination. We celebrate the heroes of that struggle, past and present. We are, at the same time, reminded in 2007 about the need for vigilance against contemporary racism, modern-day slavery, racial and religious discrimination, and hate crimes such as anti-Semitism.

The inspiring example of our great parliamentary colleague William Wilberforce continues to light the way. I would like to close my remarks with this prayer taken from the Anglican service in his honour:

"Let your continual mercy, O Lord, kindle in your church the never-failing gift of love that, following the

example of your servant William Wilberforce, we may have grace to defend the poor and maintain the cause of those who have no help."

**Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston):** As the member for a riding where more than one third of my constituents are of African decent, I am indeed honoured to be able to stand today on behalf of my leader, Howard Hampton, and my party to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade and offer our party's support for this motion.

Over the course of four centuries, over 50 million Africans were torn from their homes and sold into slavery. They were transported across the Atlantic Ocean in fetid ships, many of them dying en route, to work on plantations, on farms and in homes.

For many Canadians of African descent, the legacy of the slave trade is a hard one to come to grips with. In a powerful series of articles this week and last, the Toronto Star's Royson James has been writing about his trip to Ghana with other Torontonians to visit the sites of the slave trade, including the infamous Cape Coast Castle, a major embarkation point for recently captured slaves.

Royson James talks about the search for identity that these descendants of slaves are involved in, the attempt to reconnect with their past and their difficulties in dealing with the cruelties that their ancestors faced. While faced with these difficulties, however, his fellow travellers are able to gain new strength from the legacy of their ancestors and to reflect with pride on the fact that their forefathers went on to fight for their freedom in some cases, in other cases to risk their lives to flee slavery and in all cases to build a proud black community in the Americas.

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I want to quote a rather powerful message, a passage from one of Mr. James' columns:

"As night fell during the four-hour bus journey to Kumasi, all is quiet reflection. This is a journey into Ashanti land, a trip that would have taken the captured Africans weeks and months to traverse by foot, chained together by the neck and ankle in a terrified and wretched coffle.

"We cross a bridge over the Assin Praso river.

"This is where the slaves would get their last bath before arriving at the dungeons, the guide says.

"And after that, the damnable journey across the Atlantic to America, the Caribbean, Canada and the new world.

"Their descendants have returned. The return trip is not pretty, but it is oh so much more tolerable than the exit."

Ontario has been blessed by the many contributions of former slaves who came from the United States as Loyalists after the American Revolution. Our community was immeasurably strengthened by the addition of the numerous people who bravely escaped and made their way to Canada during the 19th century. And Ontario has been the lucky destination of thousands of members of the Afro-Caribbean community who have immigrated more

recently, including thousands into my riding of York South–Weston.

It is this legacy of strength, of resistance and of determination that characterizes the community made up of descendants of those enslaved. The slave trade was one of the great crimes of history, but its descendants transformed that legacy from a negative to a positive one. Rather than reflect on the wrongs of slavery, Ontarians of African descent have chosen to embrace their heritage and take pride in their accomplishments. There are some very ambitious plans led by the Ontario Black History Society for an African-Canadian cultural centre, an institution which would serve as a very powerful beacon to the community. We in the NDP take pride in the accomplishments of Ontarians of African descent, and we will continue to embrace their legacy.

**The Speaker:** Mr. Colle has moved a motion regarding the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln):** My question is to the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, your Minister of Health today published a letter in the National Post that says your decision to keep people waiting needlessly on waiting lists for new knees is based on sound business principles. But the front page of the Globe and Mail has a story that says that the plan put forward by Don Mills Surgical Centre would see knee replacements performed for \$1,082 less each. It's a 15% savings for what it would cost to do the same thing in a community hospital. Acting Premier, how can you see that a decision to keep people waiting for up to two years for surgery performed at a higher cost meets with sound business principles?

**Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):** It's always good to hear from people from the Conservative Party on the matter of health care given that, to this date, coming reasonably close to an election, we've got but two pieces of policy from them related to health care. The first is a \$2.5-billion cut and the second is a very, very generous commitment to move forward with privatization.

It is refreshing, now that spring has sprung, to see that the Conservative policy is being rolled out, and it is indeed no surprise that their policies on health care continue to be influenced by their real leader, Mike Harris.

**Mr. Hudak:** I say back to the minister who did everything possible to avoid a very simple question, your own assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of Health, Hugh MacLeod, described the Don Mills Surgical Centre's proposal as "relevant, particularly in light of ample evidence pointing to a very significant growth in demand for hip and knee joint replacements."

Minister, you know that if you accept this proposal, some 1,500 Ontarians currently forced to wait in pain for an average of 307 days in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, upwards of 500 days in many communities, could get this surgery in a hospital that's paid for by OHIP—no line-jumping, no paying out of pocket. And here's the bonus: That \$1.6 million in savings could be reinvested in an additional 276 knee replacements. Again I ask the minister: Where is the business case against this model?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** It's interesting that for all the dedication that the Conservative Party is prepared to offer about privatization, there's not one word of dedication to the important point, which is that wait times are significantly down in Ontario for a variety of procedures and for knees, which is the matter at hand. In fact, it's passing strange that this honourable member, who sat in cabinet and accordingly sat on his hands while the wait times for this very procedure increased, is now here standing on his feet with his only health care proposal: cut \$2.5 billion and move forward with an agenda of privatization.

We stand alongside those in the public health care system who have worked vigorously to identify new models and new ways of doing business that are producing results for Ontarians. We can measure wait times. We know that wait times for knees are down and we know, through continuing investments in the public health care system, that we will continue to improve on the results and produce better capabilities in the public health care system for the patients of Ontario.

**Mr. Hudak:** I know that this concept may seem revolutionary in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. The minister knows for a fact that these types of procedures are done in Manitoba, they're done in Alberta and they're done in British Columbia. It's commonplace under the public payment system. Here's the difference, Minister: More grandparents could then attend their grandkids' hockey games or soccer matches, and maybe more people could enjoy simple pleasures like gardening or a walk in the park.

You face a choice. You can help 1,500 patients get surgery quicker or you can make them wait even longer. I remind the minister that it's up to 700 days in communities like Kingston. Why do you choose to make them wait? Why are you playing politics with this issue behind feigned indignation? Why do you make all these people wait?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** I ask the honourable member why it was that during the period from 2001 until 2003, wait times for hips and knees in the province of Ontario increased by 21% on that honourable member's watch. Why was it okay, for eight and a half years, for that party, masquerading as a government, to sit on their hands or go for the walk in the park that he spoke about and ignore the plight and circumstances for Ontarians who were waiting too long?

We've increased access to hips and knees by 22,000 procedures. We have reduced the wait times for knees by 30.2% through the dedicated efforts of nurses and doctors

and administrators out there on the front lines. We've produced results in the context of our public health care system. We believe fundamentally that this is the way to go forward: to continue to reward the public health care system for the innovations that it's making and for the improved access that is being provided to the people of Ontario.

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

**Mr. Hudak:** Back to the minister: Minister, there seems to be a contradiction in your comments. And Lord knows, Dalton McGuinty saying one thing and doing the opposite is a rare occasion in the province of Ontario; it's a weekly occurrence. Minister, you know full well here again that the Don Mills Surgical Centre performs cataract surgery paid by the OHIP card, and it has been doing so for years. You know full well that the Don Mills Surgical Centre performs arthroscopic procedures paid for by the OHIP card. If it's okay for cataracts and it's okay for arthroscopic procedures, why is it not okay for knee replacements?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** What we know full well is that under that party's watch, wait times in the province of Ontario were rising and they didn't even invest one penny, one iota of interest in addressing that circumstance for the people of Ontario. Our Premier has been dedicated to the challenge of reducing wait times for the people of Ontario. And wait times are down, through the work that has been done on the front line by doctors and nurses, the very people that they are prepared to run away from. Instead, we say, "Thank you for the work that you've done." We continue to believe fundamentally that advances in the public health care system, innovations like the one that we offered at the Scarborough Grace Hospital recently, are the answer to providing more timely access to Ontarians to these key services. Under their watch, they were on the rise, and on our watch wait times for knee surgery are down by 30.2%.

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**Mr. Hudak:** The minister continues to ignore the fact that 1,500 patients in the province of Ontario, some of whom are waiting between 600 and 700 days for knee surgery, continue to wait while the minister is in full bluster here in question period.

The minister has drawn what looks like an ideological line in the sand, except he allows it for cataract surgeries, he allows it for arthroscopic procedures, but the minister won't allow it for knee replacement surgery.

Again, 1,500 individuals who could enjoy seeing their grandkids' soccer games, who could better enjoy life, are suffering on long waiting lists because you refuse to move ahead with this proposal to reduce the waiting lists and save money within the public health system. Minister, explain the contradiction and please tell me that you're wrong.

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** It should come as no surprise, I suppose, from a party that sat on their hands for eight and a half years while these wait times were on the rise. Now they hear from one of their Tory fund-

raising buddies, prominent in this organization, giving them lots of dough, sending unsolicited proposals forward, and now this becomes the lead question in question period.

Why is it that Mr. Tory, a couple of years into his term as the leader of the party, is yet unable to find any health care policy but two that he has borrowed from his good friend and real leader, Mike Harris: number one, cut \$2.5 billion out of health care; number two, privatize it? Where have we seen that? Where have we heard it? We heard it from them. We're not going that way. We believe in public health care. We thank the doctors and the nurses for the work they have done, and we know that if we continue to work with them and continue to invest, wait times will continue to go down.

**Mr. Hudak:** I didn't know about Hugh MacLeod's—your assistant deputy minister—political connections, Minister, but I think you know that your own ADM described this proposal as "relevant, particularly in light of ample evidence pointing to a very significant growth in demand for hip and knee replacements."

Thousands of people are languishing on waiting lists in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario that are 125 days longer than he said was proper. You know and I know and our colleagues in the border areas, like the minister beside you, know that on a regular basis people are going across the border, out of Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, to get these procedures.

You, for what appear to be ideological reasons, or maybe political reasons—maybe they've got to give more money to the Liberal Party; I don't know. But 500, 600, 700 days on wait lists for knee replacement surgeries: If you got 1,500 done, you could save \$1.6 million and reinvest that into the system; 1,700 people could come off of those waiting lists right away. Minister, it's the right thing to do. Why don't you act?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** Why is it that when provided with an opportunity, this honourable member will not stand in his place and talk about the way that his party has been influenced by a very significant financial contributor? Why is it that the Conservative Party has, today in the Legislature, taken up as their most prominent issue an issue that has been motivated and brought to the fore by someone who's a significant financial contributor in their party? It is passing fancy and strange that this close to an election, the Conservative leader continues to be a façade. He's got no platform but two on health care—reduce health care spending by \$2.5 billion; privatize it—under the influence of contributors to the Conservative Party.

This is not our interest. We believe in the work of the nurses and the doctors on the front line. Our investments will continue to be in the public health care system.

#### MINIMUM WAGE

**Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River):** To the Deputy Premier: Which do you think is more important—that a person working full-time gets paid

enough to lift themselves out of poverty, or that the Premier give himself a \$40,000-a-year pay increase?

**Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):** I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. Indeed, some of us had the opportunity to witness the honourable member's attempts on Citytv over the lunch hour to explain his policies away. He fell flat, especially when he was asked to try to explain his policies away in the face of those who asked him questions from the relevant side of the responsibilities for economic activity. When a small business person posed to this person a question, he blanched, he curled his forehead and he had no answer for the circumstances that were posed.

We campaigned very specifically on an increase to the minimum wage, and we have delivered specifically on those commitments. Our Premier has been clear to say it is not a matter of if, only when, in terms of what the rollout will be towards a \$10 minimum wage and that that goes beyond. But I say to the honourable member: We are a party that has delivered on the specific commitments that we have made. We're proud to have been able to do so. On supplementary, we'll ask him about some of the measures for people on low income that he chose to vote against.

**Mr. Hampton:** I can only take from that that the McGuinty government thinks that immediate pay increases for themselves come far and above a living wage for minimum wage workers. Your latest effort to promise an increase in the minimum wage sometime in the future still doesn't do it. Not only will this latest McGuinty government scheme leave low-paid workers struggling in poverty, but you expect people to believe another McGuinty election promise.

My question is this: Deputy Premier, can you explain why the Premier can raise his own pay by \$40,000 a year immediately but struggling low-paid workers have to continue to live in poverty for another three years before they get a pay increase?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** It's pretty rich when millionaires' row can't even fess up to the fact that they took every penny of the same pay increase that they like to bring to the floor of this Legislature. It's passing rich that this front row that failed the people of the province of Ontario on their commitment around public auto insurance likes to brag on about how great they are, while hoping that we all forget about the fact that they served in government. But at the heart of the matter—and look at the talent that he was working with. I mean, come on.

What we have here is a matter of a government delivering firmly four-square on the commitments that we made to the people of the province: four increases, the most recent one on February 1. Why do they oppose direct grants to lowest-income students in the province of Ontario? Why are they against grants for low-income students?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown):** Order. Stop the clock.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** Order. The Minister of Health Promotion will come to order.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Northern Development will come to order.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** I can wait.

Leader of the third party.

**Mr. Hampton:** This is about the 1.2 million low-paid workers this province who live below the poverty line. The McGuinty government is asking them to trust Dalton McGuinty once again. These people trusted Dalton McGuinty four years ago when Dalton McGuinty said he was going to freeze hydro rates. He broke that promise. They trusted Dalton McGuinty when he said he was going to rein in the cost of college and university education. He broke that promise. They trusted Dalton McGuinty when he promised that he was going to help autistic children and their parents rather than fight them. He broke that promise.

About the only promise the Premier didn't make was a promise to increase his own pay by \$40,000 a year, but he did that overnight. Why, I say to all the members of the McGuinty government, should the lowest-paid workers in this province, who are living in poverty, now have to wait another three years and place their trust in another all-too-often Dalton McGuinty government election promise?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** Now the honourable member has concluded that the wait will be three years, but he forgets that the most recent increase was on February 1 this year, part of a pattern of steady increases, 17% over four years. This honourable member and his party claiming—millionaires' row, millionaires' row—all of them took the pay increase. A couple of them said that they were going to offer receipts. No public transparency about it, nothing except the bluster from the honourable member who has grabbed the dough—he has got it all and he's spending it on whatever he wants.

**1440**

Why did they vote against 15,000 child care spaces? Why did they vote against direct grants, the same grants that they cut for our lowest-income students? Why are they against insulin pumps for our kids? Why has this party voted against increasing rates for social assistance and doubling support for children with autism? They make a lot of noise now, but the reality is clear. We made commitments around the minimum wage. We—

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

New question.

**Mr. Hampton:** Deputy Premier, here is the McGuinty government's record: a \$40,000 pay increase for the Premier and 25 cents for the lowest-paid workers in this province. And who are those 1.2 million workers? Most of them are women. Many of them are new Canadians struggling, working two and three minimum-wage jobs, trying to make ends meet. And now you're telling them to continue living in poverty for another three years and

to place their trust once again in Dalton McGuinty, the penultimate promise-breaker. I say again to all the members of the McGuinty government: How do you justify telling the lowest-paid workers in this province to continue living in poverty for the next three years after the Premier just gave himself a \$40,000-a-year pay increase?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** The honourable member keeps forgetting that the pay increase—which he has happily, gladly received and signed on to—in proportion, is identical to that of every other member of the Legislature. And indeed, why is it that this member, the leader of millionaires' row, is unwilling, unprepared to stand in his place and indicate on a case-by-case basis what all of those members of the NDP have done with their exactly identical proportional increase in the salary? Show us the receipts. Show us. No transparency at all.

On the matter of the minimum wage, we campaigned on a commitment and we fulfilled that commitment. We agree that the minimum wage must continue to move forward, consistent with the pattern that we've established: steady and ongoing increases. But there is more for the people in Ontario than simply the minimum wage. I ask the honourable member one more time: Why did you vote against direct grants for the most vulnerable and low-income students in the province of Ontario? Why—

**The Speaker:** Supplementary.

**Mr. Hampton:** The Deputy Premier in the McGuinty government obviously doesn't want to address this issue. Here is the reality: Your latest scheme for the minimum wage: not only does it involve people having to trust the penultimate promise-breaker, Dalton McGuinty, again, but you literally condemn them to continue to live in poverty for the next three years.

You had no problem handing over \$5 million to your pal Tom Parkinson. The Premier had no problem taking his former Bay Street fundraiser Jan Carr and paying him \$700,000 a year. The Premier had no problem raising his own pay by \$40,000 a year like that. But when it comes to the lowest-paid workers in the province, the McGuinty government says: "You continue to live in poverty. You continue to struggle in poverty. And maybe, just maybe, if Dalton McGuinty happens to keep this election promise, just maybe you might get a pay increase to \$10 an hour in 2010"—

**The Speaker:** The question has been asked. Minister.

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** How is it that the honourable member continues to justify a circumstance where he rails on about a raise that he has gladly, gleefully accepted? The honourable member, right there in the legislation, had the opportunity to opt out and he didn't. Why won't he turn to the member behind him and ask the member behind him, "What have you done with the exact same proportionate raise that all other members of the Legislature have received? How have you dealt with that in your own riding?"

The reality for this honourable member—the leader of millionaires' row—is that he has more dough than anybody else from around this joint and he's unwilling to say it. But I want to know: Why did that honourable

member and his party refuse to support a return to direct grants for the lowest-income students in Ontario? You cut them as a government. We brought them back. One hundred and twenty thousand people, one in four post-secondary students in Ontario, are again receiving direct grants from the government because access to post-secondary—

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Final supplementary.

**Mr. Hampton:** There goes the Deputy Premier again, complaining about his Liberal friend Rosedale Bob Rae. Deputy Premier, this is about working families. Working families need and deserve a minimum wage increase today and a minimum wage that is a living wage.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** This should come as no surprise, but I'm having great difficulty hearing the leader of the third party place his question. There is a level of noise from all benches that we just do not need. Order.

**Mr. Hampton:** Deputy Premier, all those 1.2 million workers who work for the minimum wage need an opportunity to get out of poverty. Instead, what they're getting is a postdated election promise from a chronic promise-breaker. These are people who trusted Dalton McGuinty four years ago when he said that he was going to deal with child care spaces. They're still waiting for child care spaces. Many of these people are still languishing on waiting lists for affordable housing. Many of them are still losing money to your clawback of the national child benefit supplement and many of them are still being denied assistance for their children struggling with autism. How can the McGuinty government honestly tell these workers who work hard every day to trust another Dalton McGuinty election promise when the end of the process will still leave them struggling in poverty?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** The honourable member, through six questions now, couldn't even raise one issue where he actually kept his word. This is the honourable member who stands here every day and makes pretend-talk with the people of Ontario and won't even fess up to the fact that, alongside every other member of his caucus, he opted into the very same circumstances related to compensation as everybody else. Why won't he just simply turn to the camera and, in an honest way, say, "I got the pay raise"? Why won't he do that? Why won't the leader from millionaires' row fess up? And why won't he acknowledge that the opportunity that is there for people to move out of poverty very often includes post-secondary education? How is it that 327,000 net new jobs have been created through resisting the temptation to do what they did and instead investing in post-secondary education and providing 120,000 people in Ontario of low income with direct grants for post-secondary education that he cut and that he now opposes?

#### ROAD SAFETY

**Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges):** To the Minister of Transportation: Minister, Rob and Lisa Manchester were killed on May 27, leaving their 7-year-old, Katie, an

orphan. That was a result of street racing. On June 7 I tabled Bill 122, which would empower front-line police officers to deal with street racing and it would outlaw aftermarket fuel systems. You refused to do anything about that bill. Four months later, 21-year-old Matthew Powers was brutally killed, the result of street racing. His mother was here at Queen's Park two weeks ago. To preempt that, you announced at that time that you were going to do something about street racing. We have seen nothing.

I would ask you today: Will you bring Bill 122 forward? We have the commitment from the third party that we will deal with it expeditiously. Let's not let another session go by without dealing with this important issue.

1450

**Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation):** I'm pleased to respond to the member. As I indicated last year, in November, when you participated in a forum on street racing at my invitation, along with a significant number of other people, when we were looking at what the components would be from all the people impacted and affected by that type of legislation, we then determined we would sit down and talk to the victims and their families, which we did. Then we went out and started talking to the RCMP and the OPP about their programs. We looked at prevention. We spoke to aftermarket. So we took a far more comprehensive approach than was currently being proposed. So there's no question that in the next couple of weeks or in a few weeks we'll be bringing something forward far more comprehensive than what had been proposed.

We were able to sit down and talk to the people themselves—not only those who are impacted but about the whole issue around prevention. Prevention is absolutely paramount as well, in terms of being—

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

**Mr. Klees:** Prevention is exactly what Bill 122 is all about. You know full well that Bill 122 was a government bill, totally vetted by Ministry of Transportation staff, your legal staff, and it was totally committed to prevention.

Yes, I was there in November. We've heard nothing from your ministry since November. Talking is not enough when we deal with this issue. Lives are being lost. There were deaths subsequently. I'm asking you today—let's at least get Bill 122 empowered so that we can do something and ensure that we don't go through another session of this place without dealing with this issue.

We'll support a bill brought forward by the government eventually—eventually. I want you now to support a bill that specifically deals with street racing. Will you agree to work with the third party and with the official opposition to deal with Bill 122 expeditiously so that we can get it on the books—

**The Speaker:** The question has been asked. Minister.

**Hon. Mrs. Cansfield:** I'm pleased to respond. You have an interesting definition of "expeditiously," since you were in government for eight years and did nothing, absolutely nothing, on street racing.

This isn't new. It isn't something that just happened overnight. It impacts and affects families right across this province. We now need to work very closely with what the federal government has put in place, what we can put in place and what we can do in terms of prevention. For example, the Ontario Provincial Police have a program called ERASE. We would like to work with them to encourage young people to find an alternative in terms of street racing. Actually, you can ask Mr. Baird about it because he participated in it as well. We had a wonderful time in Milton looking at alternatives.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Mrs. Cansfield:** Prevention is just as important—sorry, it was Mr. Chudleigh—as the punitive part of it.

You had your chance. You blew it. We're fixing it. You're too late. We're going to put in place something far more comprehensive than what you propose. You're playing politics. Absolutely. You are the people who had eight years to do something, and you did nothing—absolutely nothing.

#### AUTISM TREATMENT

**Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt):** I have a question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Shelley Thorpe and Nicole Saddler, two Hamilton moms with autistic children, are in the gallery today. They want to know why your government has discriminated against their families when it comes to paying their IBI therapists. In January, your government increased the hourly rate provided to families who pay their IBI therapists directly, but this increase doesn't apply to families who were already receiving IBI. That will happen only if and when their contracts for IBI are renewed: in July, for Nicole; and in October, for Shelley. Until then, they'll get less money to pay their therapists than families who are just starting IBI treatment now. Minister, how do you justify that discrimination?

**Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services):** I'm happy to have the opportunity to respond to this question from the member for Nickel Belt, who I acknowledge has been a very consistent and strong advocate for families and children with autism. But the member knows, because my office received an inquiry from her office this week, and my office informed her that in fact the DFO rate is being increased retroactive to January, when I introduced the new funding. So all recipients of DFO services will receive the new rate.

**Ms. Martel:** Her office didn't tell us that at all in response to our inquiry.

Your office said that some announcement would be made in the future. There was absolutely no commitment made to us, either with respect to Shelley or with respect

to Nicole, nor has the Hamilton regional provider, whom they've been dealing with, informed them of that change either.

I ask you again, Minister, because the discrimination is clear: When will that change, and will it be retroactive so these families will not be out of pocket any longer?

**Hon. Mrs. Chambers:** I know this is good news, and I know it's very hard for the member to accept good news, but you're hearing it from me. You're hearing it in the presence of several witnesses. That is my commitment. These parents will all be receiving the updated rate, and I'm sure that you're pleased that I have been revising all to do with the autism program, including the rates of DFO.

#### MINISTRY OF REVENUE

**Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre):** My question is for the Minister of Revenue.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown):** We really do need it to be a little bit more under control in here.

**Ms. Matthews:** Minister, first of all, I'd like to congratulate you on your resounding election victory and welcome you to this Legislature. I'm sure you will find this to be a very interesting, challenging and rewarding chapter in your life. We're glad to have you here.

Minister, I understand you've had a busy few weeks since becoming an MPP and minister. I wonder if you could share with this House—I'm sure they're anxious to hear, as you can tell—what specific things you've been doing in the short time since you've become minister.

**Hon. Michael Chan (Minister of Revenue):** Someone just woke me up.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Mr. Chan:** I would like to thank the member for London North Centre for her question. As I just repeat: She kind of woke me up.

This is the first time I speak to the House. I want to thank the people in Markham for choosing me as their MPP. I also want to express my gratefulness to our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, for choosing me as Minister of Revenue.

Within the first few days since I was appointed, I had the liberty to visit the head office of the Ministry of Revenue. Since then, I have visited the branches in Hamilton, North York and also in Mississauga. What I found out is that I have 28 dedicated and professional staff, and I'm very grateful for that.

This ministry is very important in this government because it collects revenue to fund important programs such as health care, education, infrastructure and other programs.

**Ms. Matthews:** Minister, I'm sure that when the Premier asked you to be minister, he told you, of course, that since you're the minister who collects all the taxes, you would be the most popular minister in the province. I'm sure that was part of the briefing.

I'd like to ask you about your priorities as you go forward. What are the most urgent priorities for you as Minister of Revenue?

*Interjection.*

**1500**

**Hon. Mr. Chan:** It's a very important ministry collecting revenue, including collecting the opposite member's salary too.

This ministry collects 43% of the total revenue of Ontario, which is equivalent to about \$37 billion.

*Interjection.*

**Hon. Mr. Chan:** That's a lot of money. You can say that again.

One of my priorities is to oversee the harmonization of the corporate tax. As you know, by 2009, the federal government will be responsible to collect those taxes. At the moment, I am overseeing the procedure, making sure it runs smoothly. Another priority is to look at the improvement of technology so that the collection of taxes can be streamlined, easier for the people, and to make it easier for them to voluntarily comply with taxes. I am—

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Minister. New question.

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington):** My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital renewal plan has been with your ministry for nearly four years, which is the entire time that you've been in power. Officials at Joseph Brant hospital couldn't even get a meeting with your staff or you until I publicly and repetitively raised this issue during the by-election. And I suppose by coincidence the hospital officials received notice from your ministry that there would be a meeting, which occurred at the end of February, and one day after I was sworn in, you finally announced design funding.

Is this just hush money, Minister, to keep me quiet, or will you stand in your place and confirm for me and the proud people of Burlington that you will include the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital renewal in your ministry's list of priority hospital projects?

**Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):** First off, I want to offer a very warm welcome to the Legislature. We all enjoy the privilege of representing our constituents and we all seek to do it well, and I want to welcome you very sincerely.

If we're very, very direct about it, we'll recognize that, while we have been in office for three and a half years, the party that preceded us for eight and a half left behind some pretty substantial challenges. Hilary Short from the Ontario Hospital Association has indicated those challenges with respect to hospital capital construction at something in the neighbourhood of \$8 to \$10 billion. Through the leadership of the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, we're very, very proud that, through our five-year plan, our government is investing more

resources in new hospital construction and renewal than the last five governments in Ontario combined.

To date, it's true that there is more work to do at Joe Brant, but even in the existing envelope they've worked through a reduction in wait times. They've enhanced their productivity. We're proud of the work that we've done, but we acknowledge that there is room to enhance the capability of the facilities. That is why we recently provided them with \$1.5 million to do the important design work that is necessary before we can move to the next stage.

**Mrs. Savoline:** I'll take that as a no, and you can be sure, Minister, that I will immediately communicate your pathetic response to the good people of Burlington. The track record of your government's dithering has tied the hands of dedicated volunteers who are ready to start raising \$20 million, half the cost of the project.

During the by-election, on your candidate's website, it stated, and I quote: "She can immediately start working from within government to get more beds and better services for Joseph Brant. As a Liberal MPP, she can deliver." I would hope that when you're dealing with critical issues and priority-setting in ridings that are not held by your party, you would park your politics at the door and treat all Ontarians, regardless of which MPP represents the riding, with respect and the attention that you give to Liberal ridings.

You didn't answer my question, Minister, so I ask you again: Will you stand in your place and confirm for me and the proud people of Burlington that you will include JBMH renewal in your ministry's list of priority hospital projects?

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** Before the honourable member concludes that the answer was pathetic, which she had to read, maybe she should lean to her right—

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Mr. Smitherman:** Maybe she should lean to the gentleman to her right and ask him how the regional cancer centre is coming along in his community. Talk to the member from Woodstock about how the circumstances are proceeding with the new hospital there; ask the member from Oak Ridges how the expansion of York Central Hospital is coming. Before the honourable member suggests that there is politics being played, she should know a little about all the hospital capital re-development that's going on amongst colleague ridings. Your party has a \$2.5-billion cut to health care on the table. Why don't you try and figure out how that's going to be helpful to Joe Brant?

#### PAPER MILL

**Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River):** To the Deputy Premier: Three years ago, forestry industry representatives told the McGuinty government that your scheme to drive industrial hydro rates through the roof would close literally dozens of mills and destroy thousands of jobs in the forest sector. You refused to listen, and so three years later that's what has happened. But

yesterday the court ordered the wind-down of operations at St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie. What's interesting is that the Liberal MPP for Sault Ste. Marie responded by telling the St. Marys Paper workers that they must take a 20% pay cut for the next seven years and make a litany of concessions on their pensions for the mill to stay open.

My question is this: Is this the McGuinty government plan for the forest sector in northern Ontario: Drive industrial hydro rates through the roof, force paper mills to the financial edge and then tell the workers it's their fault and that they should take pension cuts and pay cuts to make up for the wrong-headed policies of the McGuinty government?

**Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):** To the Minister of Natural Resources.

**Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs):** Over the last three months we've been working with the union. I've met with the union representatives of St. Marys Paper and with management there. We have been assisting on a daily basis with the negotiations that have occurred between management and the union. We have offered the company, in order to form a sound basis for an organized restructuring of the company, all sorts of assistance to make that happen. In the end, it looks like there is going to be an orderly wind-down through a court order. We certainly hope that, since this has failed, there's still going to be paper production in St. Marys under a new company, but we worked very hard to make sure and tried very hard to get a seamless transition into a new company so that paper production and all those jobs could go on in Sault Ste. Marie.

**Mr. Hampton:** This is like listening to the minister responsible for shutting down northern Ontario. The workers there know that it was literally the doubling of the hydro bill for that mill that pushed the mill to the financial edge. Who sets hydro rates in Ontario? The McGuinty government. Who says that these mills, many of which are located near power dams where electricity is produced for one cent a kilowatt hour, have to pay seven cents a kilowatt hour? The McGuinty government. Minister, don't you feel a little shame? Don't you feel a little bit of guilt after pushing mills like St. Marys to the financial edge? Don't you feel a little guilt now, saying to the workers, "It's your fault. You take a 20% pay cut for seven years. You take a cut in the pension. You give up some of your job security"? Is this the McGuinty government's prosperity plan for northern Ontario: Push mills to the brink, then blame it on the workers and tell them to take a pay cut? Is that the McGuinty government plan?

**Hon. Mr. Ramsay:** What brought St. Marys Paper to the financial brink was an outstanding pension liability that their banker, the Bank of America, said was unsustainable, so the banker and the company agreed to go into bankruptcy protection so that they could organize this and look for and try to negotiate an orderly restructuring of the company. As you know, the workers own



20% of St. Marys Paper and they're partners in this too. We worked very hard with them and with management, and it looked in the end like we weren't able to do it. We hope in the end that, after this is over, in the next stage there is a new company there and we're again making paper in Sault Ste. Marie.

1510

#### AGRICULTURE FUNDING

**Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough):** My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I'm extremely proud of our government's accomplishments on behalf of the province's agriculture and food sector. Recently you had the chance to visit the great riding of Peterborough and meet with local farmers to allow them the opportunity to discuss our government's agricultural programs. It was a very productive meeting, and the farmers really appreciated an opportunity to meet with you over a couple of hours.

Minister, how has our government helped farmers since taking office in the fall of 2003?

**Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs):** First of all, I very much appreciate any and every opportunity I have to sit down and speak with farmers and certainly the member from Peterborough. The meeting I had that day—very clearly, he is a good friend to farmers in his community.

With respect to what this government has done since we came to office, since 2003 we have invested \$910 million in new money over and above what we spent at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I will say, in the year 2006 alone, in addition to the \$17 million more that my ministry received at the time of the budget, last March we also announced an additional \$125 million for farmers. They indicated that they were going to have difficulty, many of them, buying the seed and the fertilizer for their crops. Our government assisted them in that way, along with the federal government. In the fall of last year, at the plowing match in Peterborough county, our Premier announced an additional \$110 million. This \$110 million was in partnership with the federal government, which had provided some additional resources as well.

I will say to the honourable members of this Legislature that Ontario is the only province in Canada to match those federal dollars. I know it was very—

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

**Mr. Leal:** Thank you, Minister, and the farmers that day acknowledged your leadership and the leadership of your predecessor, the now Minister of Labour.

In stark contrast, the previous Conservative government had a record of neglect and mismanagement when it came to rural Ontario, especially in my riding of Peterborough. They closed the local ag office in my riding and many others across Ontario. Under Mr. Tory's party, they abandoned rural Ontario and turned their

backs on the farmers. Now they have an unholy alliance with the landowners.

Minister, can you please explain to this House the devastating effect that the previous Conservative government had on rural Ontario?

*Laughter.*

**Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky:** It's interesting that members of the opposition side laugh at this question, but I can say that farmers across Ontario certainly didn't laugh when it happened and they're not laughing now. But they will remember. They will remember what the Conservatives did to rural Ontario for those eight years, those eight years of terror.

The previous government cut \$80 million from the Ministry of Agriculture budget. They shut down 41 offices of OMAFRA. They didn't just shut them down; they got out of town. They sold the real estate—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** We only have 11 minutes left. Let's try to be calm and under control.

The Minister of Agriculture.

**Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky:** They got out of town. They sold the real estate. They left communities like Brockville, like Carleton Place, like Lanark, like Perth, like Nepean, like Muskoka, like Walkerton, like Orangeville, like Georgetown, like Chatham, Essex, St. Thomas, Clarksburg, Sault Ste. Marie. Those communities are still stinging from the neglect of the previous government. We will not abandon rural Ontario. Our government has invested and we will continue to be there for farmers in rural communities.

#### CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke):** My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last September, you received an urgent appeal from Greg Lubimiv, the executive director of the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families in my riding, co-signed by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Rundle, the base commander of CFB Petawawa, looking for immediate special funding to deal with the burgeoning increase in the need for mental health services for children in and around the Petawawa base area as a result of the deployment in Afghanistan and the tremendous stress that was placing on families in that area.

Minister, you turned them down flat, citing your reasoning that it's the responsibility of the federal government to provide those services to families of the military. Subsequent communications from Greg Lubimiv indicated that you were wrong. The Ombudsman is now involved in this. You are wrong.

Why do you continue to victimize children in Renfrew county and around base Petawawa by denying this very, very important funding?

**Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services):** The Phoenix Centre in Renfrew county receives just short of \$1.8 million per

year, and with that has been serving approximately 1,400 kids with mental health challenges each year. In fact, they received some of the increase in funding that our government announced after we were elected, following 12 years of frozen funding for the children's mental health sector. That sector now is funded to the tune of \$467.5 million, which represents a \$38-million increase that they have received from our government.

There is more to be done in the children's mental health sector, but we have come a long way from the 12 years of frozen funding.

**Mr. Yakubuski:** It would appear that the minister does accept that it is a provincial responsibility to fund those programs, and that's a good admission by omission on your part, Minister.

The question is, why do you continue to victimize children? These are extraordinary circumstances in extraordinary times. This is not about playing games with Ottawa or looking to the past. This is an issue of real significance today. As a result of those military deployments, the mental health needs of children and families in Renfrew county are burgeoning under your watch, and you sit back and get into a tug-of-war with the federal government.

Will you commit to this House today, before the Ombudsman actually compels you to do so, to fund those very important programs and not let any more children fall between the cracks on your watch?

**Hon. Mrs. Chambers:** While the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has been blowing hot air on this subject, I have actually made the observation that these children of military men and women are in fact experiencing a heightened incidence of stress because of the military effort in Afghanistan, and that centre, which was totally under control until December 2005, specifically associated their increase in referrals and caseloads with that effort. So I'm very pleased that the federal government has heard my plea on behalf of those families and, according to the budget that was delivered on Monday, will be establishing centres to provide services for military families around this country. I'm surprised the member doesn't know that.

I actually am very, very grateful for what the—

*Interjections.*

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

#### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York):** My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Madam Minister, yesterday I asked you what I thought was a very simple question. I asked you why your government was punishing the Patterson family and pushing them deeper into poverty by clawing back orphan benefits for two needy children, one who has a brain tumour and the other who has a diagnosed mental illness.

Just by way of background, Revenue Canada states that an orphan's benefit belongs to the child, not to the guardian who receives it. But you say that you need these children's money more than, obviously, they do, so you're clawing it back.

Please just answer the question: Will you do the right and honourable thing and reinstate the Patterson family's Ontario Works benefit and let the orphaned, sick children keep their own money?

**Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs):** I thank the member from Beaches–East York for his question. As the member knows, I cannot talk about specific cases.

It's very unfortunate when there are children who are in need, and this government has worked very, very hard to improve the situation of children in Ontario. However, the CPP benefits are treated as income and not earnings. This is not a change. CPP benefits have always been treated as income under social assistance since the introduction of CPP in 1966. As you are aware, Ontario Works is a program of last resort and individuals must pursue all financial resources they or their dependants may be entitled to before they are eligible for social assistance.

1520

**Mr. Prue:** Madam Minister, again, Revenue Canada says that this money belongs to the children, not to the guardian. If you want to tax these children—and this is the only thing they get. They don't even pay income tax. They don't even pay, but you're taking it off their parent as if it was the parent's money. It is the children's money.

You said that this is a program of last resort. This is the only resort that these poor two little children who are now orphaned from a deceased father have. I don't understand why you're doing this to children. I do not understand it, and I do not understand the statement that you've made. It is the orphans' money, not their guardian's. It is the orphans' money that you are taking. You're punishing the guardian, who in turn will, I guess, have to take the orphans' money off them. That is the effect of what you're doing. Will you do the right thing today in this House and give back the dignity you stole from this family and reinstate those benefits?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** As I said, this has been the practice since 1966, and it's the practice across the country.

But I'm going to ask a question to the member on the other side. When his leader in the front row was sitting in cabinet, they did not do anything to change it. Why? Because that's the practice across the country. When we calculate benefits for someone who needs welfare, all the income of the family unit is taken into consideration.

I would say to the member opposite, we have looked across the country and this is the practice in every province. We still need the answer from Saskatchewan, but the rest of the provinces are having the same practice adopted.

## IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

**Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh):** My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, population growth is as essential to the vitality of a nation as growth is to an individual. For quite some time, birth rates in Ontario and throughout Canada have not been as high as we would like them to be. While I am from a family of 12 children, it is exceedingly rare to find that today.

Minister, to maintain steady population growth, we need to look towards immigration. What's more, the skilled immigrants who come to this province have to be provided with opportunities to use the skills that they trained for, many of which we face a shortage of in this country and province. Minister, can you tell us what our government is doing to break down barriers for the newcomers to this province?

**Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** I would like to thank the member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. He's so right. There's a very obvious challenge. We have a flat birth rate and we have an older and aging workforce, so immigration is the key to keep our workforce stable. In fact, in five years, all our new net growth in the labour force will come from immigration. So it's a reality we face. That's why we have a comprehensive plan to break down barriers for newcomers so they can get jobs, so they can get training; they can be welcomed.

The good news is, because of Bill 124, because of our \$5,000 loan program, because of the \$920 million we are finally getting from the federal government, we're able to really break down barriers for newcomers so they can go to Cornwall, they can go to Kenora and they can go to Toronto and work and contribute to the economy and contribute to the community.

## PETITIONS

### SMITHS FALLS ECONOMY

**Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton):** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Hershey Canada has announced the closure of its Smiths Falls plant, putting 500 people out of work; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has announced that it will close the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls as of 2009, putting another 800 people out of work; and

“Whereas these closures will result in additional job losses at local suppliers to Hershey, such as dairy farms, local tourism operators and all local businesses; and

“Whereas the 9,200 residents of Smiths Falls will be devastated by these 1,300-plus job losses;

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

“That the government of Ontario continue to work with Hershey to reverse the decision to close the Smiths Falls plant;

“That the government of Ontario immediately fund infrastructure projects in Smiths Falls like the hospital redevelopment in order to attract new industry;

“That the government of Ontario complete the four-laning of Highway 7 and the reconstruction of Highway 15 at an accelerated pace;

“That the government of Ontario postpone the closure of the Rideau Regional Centre at least until it has replaced the 800 jobs with an equal number of new public sector jobs;

“That the government of Ontario create a fund equivalent to the northern Ontario heritage fund to attract investment to eastern Ontario.”

It's my pleasure to sign that petition on behalf of the people of Smiths Falls.

## LONG-TERM CARE

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

“Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

“Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

“Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

“Whereas on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

“Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provision in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funds by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

This has been signed by several residents of my constituency, and I affix my signature as well.

## IDENTITY THEFT

**Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport):** I keep getting petitions from the Consumer Federation of Canada, and it's about the item of identity theft, addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and specifically the Minister of Government Services.

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

"(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

"(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

"(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign my name to it.

1530

## STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

**Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey):** A petition to reopen the birthing unit at Stevenson Memorial Hospital.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

"Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

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

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to

Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston."

I, of course, agree with that petition, and I have signed it.

## GASOLINE PRICES

**Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay):** I have a petition here that was circulated in the Kapuskasing area in regard to gas prices, and it reads as follows:

"We, from the northeastern communities, who live in towns along the Highway 11 corridor from Geraldton to Cochrane, are being ripped off by gasoline companies. Presently we're paying from 20 to 26 cents per litre more than in the southern region, which adds up to about another dollar per litre.

"We are told that transportation costs are a quarter cent per litre to take gasoline from the refiner to the pertinent pumps in these towns. This situation is becoming intolerable. The companies and governments are realizing exorbitant profits, which total into the millions of dollars compared to the south. The cost of living in the north has realized a huge rise in costs on all other commodities because of the price of gas, such as food and other essentials.

"Many are concerned and complain, even our municipal officers, about the unfair treatment which we are getting in northeastern Ontario with regard to gas prices.

"Therefore, be it resolved that the government take action in order to regulate the price of gas, in order to give fairness to citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I affix my signature to that.

## LONG-TERM CARE

**Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge):** I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up, and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bedroom ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

“Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal program and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

#### LAKERIDGE HEALTH

**Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition as a result of a meeting that you were at last night, as well as Mr. O’Toole and Ms. Elliott, a result of Mr. Paul Taylor, which reads as follows:

“Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

“Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health.”

I affix my name in full support.

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park):** I also have a petition from the Lakeridge Health Centre.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

“Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health.”

I agree with this petition and I’m going to affix my signature.

#### GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

**Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh):** I have a petition from some members of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

“Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province but have yet to be officially recognized; and

“Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

“Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Enact Bill 25, an act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario.”

As I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature and send it with Sarah to the Clerk’s table.

#### LAKERIDGE HEALTH

**Mr. John O’Toole (Durham):** I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of Paul Taylor and the Lakeridge community in the riding of Durham and the region of Durham which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

“Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program—mental health and children’s mental health—“at Lakeridge Health;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health.”

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that you were there last night. I was there, and Christine Elliott and Jerry Ouellette. I know the whole community is supportive of me signing and endorsing this petition.

#### LONG-TERM CARE

**Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex):** I have a petition signed on behalf of long-term-care home residents in the province. Some 35,000 residents who still live in older homes, many in three- and four-bed ward rooms.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

**Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges):** I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding long-term care, and I present it now.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of

care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

“Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

“Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

“Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member’s motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

“Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I will affix my signature to this, and I trust that the budget tomorrow will contain these provisions.

1540

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2007

#### LOI DE 2007 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

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.

**Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal):** It’s a tremendous privilege for me to have a chance to begin third reading debate on this—I’m sorry. It has been a while. I beg leave to introduce Bill 155. I move third reading of Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2006.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue):** Mrs. Bountrogianni has moved third reading of Bill 155.

Madam Minister?

**Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I was finishing up my French homework. I shouldn’t do that here.

It’s a tremendous privilege for me to have a chance today to begin third reading debate on this very important piece of legislation, Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act. I’ll be splitting my time here this afternoon

with the honourable member from Brampton Centre, my parliamentary assistant and colleague Linda Jeffrey.

This is a very important piece of legislation. This bill being debated this evening will ensure that if a referendum is held on electoral reform, we will have a legitimate process in place that will provide Ontarians with a clear outcome. I’m proud to speak to a piece of legislation that so clearly illustrates our government’s belief that the shape of Ontario’s democracy is a matter for Ontarians to decide. This bill speaks to the basics of the democratic renewal agenda, giving greater voice to the people of this province. Our government believes that if a recommendation for an alternative electoral system is made, every citizen in this province should have a chance to make the choice for themselves in a referendum.

Off the bat, I would like to thank all the individuals who came to the public hearings on this bill held here in Toronto and all the individuals who made written submissions. It is always heartening to see Ontarians take an interest in their democratic system.

I’d like to spend some time talking about this piece of legislation and the importance of this legislation to the people of Ontario.

First of all, this legislation does not presume any outcome. We do not know whether any change will be recommended by the citizens’ assembly or what any recommendation might be. This legislation, if passed, would make it possible for Ontarians to determine which electoral system best reflects their values via a referendum to be held at the next provincial election. Our responsibility is to ensure that citizens’ voices are heard loud and clear.

Pour la première fois dans l’histoire de notre province, la population aura l’occasion de participer à un débat ouvert et approfondi sur notre système électoral. C’est une occasion sans précédent pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes d’aider à renforcer notre démocratie. Jamais un gouvernement ontarien n’a donné aux citoyens ce genre d’occasion de façonner les rouages du gouvernement. C’est un procédé sain et passionnant.

This is historic legislation. A decision to change electoral systems should not be taken lightly. Regular elections allowing citizens to choose who will represent them and govern are the foundation of our democracy. Different electoral systems have different strengths and can have a significant impact on our political landscape. Our government believes that it is the people of Ontario who should decide what values are most important and how they want their government to work.

This legislation will ensure that the wording of the referendum question, if a referendum is required, will be clear, concise and impartial. I also would like to mention that this legislation establishes that the referendum ballot shall be separate from the election ballot.

Before I continue to speak about this bill and, more specifically, the public hearings that we had on this bill, I’d like to take a moment and speak about some of the other ways our government is bringing Ontario’s democracy into the 21st century.

I'd like to start by speaking about 103 Ontarians who, with their chair, George Thomson, have spent every other weekend since September at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University. All members, 52 women and 51 men, one person from each of Ontario's ridings, are combining their unique perspectives, their creativity and their range of experience to the work of the assembly. I'm speaking about the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. These Ontarians accepted the task of learning about our current electoral system and others around the world. They will decide in the weeks ahead whether Ontario should keep or change the electoral system they have inherited. I don't know if any of them knew how exciting this entire process would be.

**Mr. John O'Toole (Durham):** Exciting? Some of them have resigned.

**Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni:** No, they haven't, actually. None have resigned.

Many more wrote in to the assembly and expressed their thoughts on electoral reform via written submissions.

Monsieur le Président, encourager une participation concrète au système démocratique de l'Ontario est le fondement du programme de renouveau démocratique de notre gouvernement. Nous croyons que les gouvernements font les meilleurs choix lorsque les citoyennes et citoyens sont engagés.

That's why we established the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. The assembly is a new form of decision-making that is empowering citizens as never before. No government in this province has ever given citizens this kind of opportunity to shape Ontario's democracy.

The assembly had a chance to hear from Ontarians. This winter, the assembly members led public consultations in their cities and towns across the province. Ontarians exchanged ideas about electoral reform and made their views known to assembly members. I was fortunate to have been able to attend a meeting in Hamilton. Many of the meetings generated a great deal of interest. More than 100 citizens attended the meeting in Toronto. It seems as though this process has engaged citizens throughout the province.

They had the opportunity to hear and now consider the values of Ontarians. In addition, they have been asked to consider a number of values and principles in their deliberations that include voter choice and stable and effective government, some of the fundamentals that underlie democratic systems here and around the world. During their final weeks of deliberation, assembly members are considering everything they have learned. The final report will outline the assembly's recommendation about whether Ontario should keep the current electoral system or adopt a new one. The report will be delivered to the government by May 15, 2007.

If the assembly decides that there should be a change to our current electoral system, a referendum is needed to allow all voting Ontarians the chance to have their say. I stand in the House today to ask my colleagues to support

this very important piece of legislation that would allow a referendum to take place if the citizens' assembly recommends a new electoral system.

The citizens' assembly has invested much time and effort in making its recommendation. The work of the citizens' assembly members is an incredible contribution to Ontario's democratic life. This legislation reflects the significance of this decision as well as the significance of the task we gave to the citizens' assembly.

Our government also invited Ontario's youth to participate in this exciting process. The Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform was a parallel citizens' assembly process for Ontario high school students. It empowered young Ontarians by giving them a say in the electoral reform process in a way that was interactive, youth-focused and inclusive.

Our coordinating partners from the students' assembly created ways for young Ontarians to participate in the debate on electoral reform that are consistent with their values, their lifestyle and their expectations. A weekend assembly meeting was held for 103 high school students this fall. At the same time, classroom assemblies were held in high schools across Ontario. In February, the students' assembly presented its recommendation to the citizens' assembly. The organizers have reported that the students have continued the dialogue on electoral reform informally through e-mails and blogs.

The students kicked off their weekend with a visit to Queen's Park, where they were able to see our Legislature in action during question period. Afterwards, a reception was held, and many of the students' assembly members had a chance to meet with their local MPP. Many more have set up meetings with their local MPP and visited their constituency offices. I'm sure the members of this House equally enjoyed the experience. The enthusiasm generated by the students' exercise has taken on a life of its own. I believe this shows that, contrary to what some might think, young Ontarians are anything but apathetic about government. Our investment in the students' assembly has extended far beyond the organized activities held last year.

I'd like to share some things said by students' assembly members on the process.

One said, "I think it's a testament to the students' assembly's importance that the idea of a students' assembly was so well received. It really is a jumping-off point for the future." I couldn't agree more. Students are our future, and whenever young Ontarians become involved in the political process, I think it's important to acknowledge that participation and applaud them.

Another said, "I was never one for politics, and always thought of voting as my only contribution to the government. I must admit, it's still a bit weird having this opinion changed."

One more I would like to share with you all: A student said, "One of the highlights from those five days was when we visited Queen's Park and were able to witness question period. Although I live in Toronto, it was my

first time actually going inside the building and seeing the heart of Ontario in action.”

**1550**

I think this last statement says it all: “At the end of the day, this type of citizen engagement represents the heart of Ontario in action.”

Whether the assembly chooses to change our current system or not, the exercise of re-examining our electoral system will reinvigorate and heighten our understanding of our democracy.

Before I talk about the public hearings on this bill, I would like to take a moment to mention some of our other democratic renewal accomplishments. We’ve amended the province’s election laws and set regularly scheduled election dates because we believe that citizens should know when elections will be held. In this way, we have created a level playing field for all candidates. In that legislation we had a flexibility mechanism. If the first Thursday in October, the fixed polling day for general elections, falls on a day of religious or cultural significance, the Chief Election Officer can recommend that polling day be moved to any of the subsequent seven days.

Our government has improved the transparency of our political process by requiring real-time public disclosure of political contributions of \$100 and more to political parties and leadership candidates. That information is now just a mouse click away. We’ve also required that the cabinet ministers attend question period at least two thirds of the time. We’ve banned partisan government advertising. And for the upcoming general election we have preserved 11 northern ridings and increased the number of provincial ridings in the south from 92 to 96. We believe that every region of Ontario is significant and has an important role to play in building a strong and prosperous province. We also believe that in order to do so, every region needs to be represented effectively in the Legislature.

That’s not all, but I would like to move on to the hearings that we had for this bill and share with my colleagues on both sides of this House what we heard and the outcomes of those discussions. Our government wanted to hear what Ontarians had to say about this piece of legislation. That’s why the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly called public hearings. I’d like to thank the members of the standing committee, including the member for Brampton Centre, Linda Jeffrey—my parliamentary assistant—for all their work.

At the hearings, Ontarians from different walks of life expressed a wide range of views on this legislation. We heard from some of our members across the aisle. We also heard from leading stakeholders and engaged citizens. The presentations provided insight into the legislation and the importance of electoral reform for Ontarians. A number of key issues were raised, from representation of women, minorities and youth, to suggestions for a possible public education campaign. We thank all of our presenters for their contribution to this legislative process.

M. le Président, le gouvernement a reçu, par écrit, les points de vue d’un groupe varié de particuliers et d’organismes, dont l’Assemblée des étudiants. Nous remercions les Ontariens et Ontariennes qui ont participé et nous ont fait connaître leurs pensées et leurs idées.

During the public hearings, we heard concerns about what happens to the reports of the referendum campaign organizers in relation to the legislation’s repeal date. There was a call for greater certainty about the length of time records would be retained by Elections Ontario. An amendment has been made to ensure that it is clear that records will remain posted on the Internet for six years after the referendum.

Since I was appointed minister responsible for democratic renewal, I’ve been inspired by how passionate citizens are about their democracy and how committed they are to ensuring it remains strong in the future. The citizens’ assembly consultations, the presenters and authors of the submissions to the standing committee all showed the interest Ontarians have in participating in decisions about their democracy. This is what citizen engagement is all about: It’s about providing opportunities for Ontarians to have meaningful participation in the deliberative and decision-making process. It’s also about facilitating debate and discussion and creating forums for Ontarians to listen to one another.

By passing this legislation, we will be telling Ontarians that their participation in this historic initiative will have a meaningful impact on the government’s decisions. This is democracy in action, a democracy that belongs to the citizens of Ontario, not just their elected officials. If the citizens’ assembly recommends an alternative electoral system, this legislation will give every Ontarian the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Le gouvernement McGuinty continue de jouer un rôle moteur dans le renouveau de notre démocratie. Il est déterminé à faire participer à notre système électoral un nombre accru d’Ontariens et d’Ontariennes. Il met beaucoup d’efforts à combattre le désenchantement politique et à accroître le taux de participation électorale ainsi que l’engagement des citoyens.

This legislation is about providing every citizen of this province the opportunity to make the choice for themselves in a referendum. By participating in a referendum, Ontarians will continue to build a strong, vital democracy for our province.

I’m very proud to support this bill today. I urge the members of this House to join me in support of Bill 155 because our democracy makes us more than just a group of people, more than just a population; it makes us a society.

**Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre):** As the parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal, I’m delighted to speak today in support of third reading of Bill 155, Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007.

Let me start off by saying that this bill will enable every Ontarian voice to be heard regarding the province’s



electoral system. The independent Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is now in the final stages of their deliberation. Their task is to recommend whether Ontario should keep the current system or adopt a new one.

As the minister stated earlier, these assembly members have been spending two weekends a month since September studying our current electoral system and others. They also led public consultations in communities across this province. As well, these 103 members were given the opportunity to consult with the former members of the select committee on electoral reform. If the citizens' assembly recommends the need for change to the electoral system, a referendum would take place in conjunction with the next provincial election in October 2007.

With the launch of this citizens' assembly and the hopeful passing of Bill 155, our government is sending a message to the people of this province. We are sending a message that we are listening, and it is the people of Ontario who have the power to shape the future of the electoral system.

The Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007, is proposed to ensure that, should a referendum on electoral reform be necessary, Ontarians have a legitimate and transparent process in place that will lead to a meaningful outcome.

A referendum decision rule sets the level of popular support required for a referendum option to carry. A decision rule may include more than one threshold that must be met. Should the citizens' assembly recommend a new electoral system for Ontarians to vote on, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007, proposes two thresholds for the referendum vote to meet, one being 60% of all votes cast province-wide, plus a simple majority of more than 50% of votes cast in at least 64% provincial ridings, the equivalent of 60% or more of provincial ridings.

An undertaking of this magnitude must have solid support from across Ontario. I believe this proposed legislation reflects the significance of this electoral reform and indeed what is meant when we say the word "democracy."

The citizens of Ontario will not be making this decision blindly. If the citizens' assembly recommends an alternative electoral system, we will ensure that Ontarians have access to fair and neutral information they need to make an informed decision on the referendum.

If in the referendum Ontarians vote to change the electoral system, the government would be bound by the results to introduce the alternative system. This proposed legislation would require the government to introduce a bill by December 31, 2008. This bill would support implementing the recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

It's up to Ontarians to decide which electoral system best reflects their values. It is the government's responsibility to guarantee that their voices are heard loud and clear.

This bill promotes our belief in democracy where each citizen has an opportunity to participate in building a better society, and our government takes pride in empowering the citizens we serve.

We heard a variety of recommendations and concerns expressed on the issue of threshold. We heard arguments for a simple majority and those in support of our recommended decision rule. What we must remember is that the adoption of a new electoral system represents a foundational change in Ontario's democracy.

We believe that a decision of this magnitude deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across this province. This proposed legislation reflects the significance of this decision. We're requiring solid majority among the Ontario electorate and regions of our province. We believe that the people of Ontario deserve that level of certainty.

#### 1600

I had the opportunity to sit on the committee that heard from numerous Ontarians on this piece of legislation. It was very heartening to hear how passionate Ontarians are about this bill and the issue of electoral reform. Presenters drove to Toronto in a snowstorm so that their views could be heard and known.

There is something to be said about the fundamentals behind such an important piece of legislation. It's important to understand how a referendum vote would be administered, and I'd be happy to explain some of those details. This legislation is rooted in the existing election process. The referendum would be administered by Elections Ontario in a way that maintains both the integrity of the election and the referendum. The powers of candidates and their scrutineers would not change, and they would retain the right to challenge electors and oversee the vote and the vote-counting process.

If passed, this bill will build on our existing election process and allow our referendum to take place with the same safeguards and protections. We recognize the need to make sure that Ontarians have confidence in the election process. We understand the importance of transparency with respect to the rules that will govern a potential referendum campaign period. This bill entrenches the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the referendum process and the electoral process.

This proposed legislation would also allow the government to create, and Elections Ontario to enforce, rules regarding referendum campaign finances. There may be spending and contribution limits set similar to those that govern parties and candidates. The structure that we have proposed for referendum campaign finances rules is similar to the Election Finances Act. It would include spending and contribution limits, advertising rules, and reporting and record-keeping requirements similar to those of governing parties and their candidates.

The regulations would impose registration requirements on those wishing to campaign in the referendum and, overall, enhance the transparency and fairness of the process.

This is, in all, an effort to ensure that a referendum campaign is carried out in a manner such that Ontarians will be equipped with the information necessary to make informed opinions in an election. These rules would enable a province-wide referendum conversation and establish an inclusive process that's good for democracy.

This legislation is about this government's faith in the people of Ontario to make the best decision about the shape of our political system. We are encouraged that so many Ontarians are enthusiastic about participating in a referendum debate. We trust the people of Ontario to approach this historic task thoughtfully and carefully and choose a course of action that will ensure Ontario continues to have a strong, vital democracy for the future. I am very proud to speak in support of this bill today, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments? The member for Renfrew—no, not Renfrew.

**Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton):** Lanark—

**The Acting Speaker:** Lanark–Carleton.

**Mr. Sterling:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, even though I sat with you on the select committee on this and you haven't even learned the name of my—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Sterling:** At any rate, I guess at this point I want to emphasize that this is a Liberal Party initiative and not an initiative of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This is driven home by the whole process of this electoral reform. There was no debate in this Legislature prior to the select committee being set up. There was no invitation to members from the opposition parties or the leaders of the opposition parties for their views as to whether a citizens' assembly was the best way to travel with regard to getting to a referendum question.

Lastly, the most significant lack of consultation results when the citizens' committee comes forward with its proposal. The referendum question will not be approved by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; it will in fact be approved by the cabinet of Ontario—the Liberal Party of Ontario. The whole process is jiggered to not include the people who are elected to the Legislative Assembly at this time, and it does not seek their approval, either at the initial stages or at the final stages, for the legitimacy of this whole process. So this \$6-million exercise—what the citizens' assembly is costing the taxpayer of Ontario—is a little bit of a farce.

**Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park):** This is a cynical piece of legislation. It's cynical about democracy. It's cynical about the role of the electorate. It's cynical about the possible role of women and minorities in government. It's also cynical about their own Liberal-dominated select committee on electoral reform, included in which were Wayne Arthurs, Caroline Di Cocco, Kuldeep Kular, Richard Patten, Monique Smith and Kathleen Wynne, all of whom voted unanimously for a 50%-plus-one cut-off. Instead of this, of course, what we've got is 60%, and not only 60% but also more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in 60% of the

ridings, at least 64 electoral districts. By this marker, a very few people, members of this Legislature, would be elected. In fact, only 46% of Ontarians actually voted for the Liberal Party in the last election. Clearly they have more seats than that.

What they're frightened of by passing this piece of legislation is that the citizens' assembly will actually do what they asked them to do, and that is to bring in an astute and informed view of another sort of electoral system, and most specifically probably the mixed-member proportional electoral system, which would no doubt cost some Liberal seats and no doubt add to the seats of the New Democratic Party and other smaller parties in this province. They don't want to see that. That's what this bill is about. Make no mistake about it, it's an act of cynicism; it's not an act of democracy, certainly not an act of renewal. I feel sorry for the 103 members of the citizens' assembly who will in effect have wasted their time for 26 weeks when they see this Bill 155.

**Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe):** I'm honoured and privileged to stand up this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 155, to open the voting system up for the public and ask their support. I think it's a very good initiative. I know our government played the role very well, according to the democratic process by which we sent people across the province. They held many different assemblies across Ontario to seek advice and to see how we can reform our voting system.

I've been listening to many opposition members and people talking about it. They say it's very difficult to pass that threshold being created by the citizens' assembly, but I want to tell the public through this spot here that many times many different parties have passed those percentages. I give an example: The NDP in 1990 got almost 57% of the total percentage of the voters. Also, the Conservatives in 1995 got almost 63% from the total vote in the province. So this threshold is not difficult to pass, and I think would be a democratic way to see the majority of people of Ontario who want to change that democratic system. It has to be a great majority. It's important to open it up to see the people in 2007 at the next election, on October 10, that when they come to vote hopefully they will choose whatever system they want and we can open it up for the people. If they choose it, then hopefully it will become a law and the whole system will be changed.

I think it's very important for our democracy. It's not like every single time and by a small minority that people come and then change the electoral system, because I think it would reflect badly on our democratic process. It's important. When we talk about elections, when we talk about voting, when we talk about representation, we have to make sure that a big majority chooses that system, because we're going to live with it for a long time to come.

1610

**Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln):** I'm pleased to join the debate on the bill and look forward to the comments from my colleague from Lanark–Carleton, Mr. Sterling,

and Mr. O'Toole's address as well. I share many of the concerns my colleague Mr. Sterling has brought forward, and will in greater detail shortly.

There's no doubt that this process is pushed towards a certain end, which I suspect will be some form of proportional representation. I believe that citizens who have volunteered themselves to these positions, those who have dedicated a tremendous amount of time on weekends to sit through endless lectures, to sit through different public meetings, will feel that they want to make change for that time. I find it hard to believe that they will even seriously consider maintaining the status quo or doing what should be done: improving the way that this place functions and strengthening individual members in the assembly. I have no doubt that those who invest their time are going to want to bring about fundamental change just by the nature of having expended those types of resources. In fact, if you look at a number of the biographies and their comments on the website, they talk about their opportunity to make historic change in the province of Ontario, to toss out this system and embrace something from God knows where, as a replacement that has not been tried in Canada before.

I'll have a chance, hopefully, to speak on this further down the line, but I resent the notion of having to sit beside another member of the assembly who represents no people, who does not have a riding to go to on weekends when the House is not in session, who is representative of no particular constituents, that if somebody is upset with a government decision, the work of their MPP, that individual will never be called on the carpet. There is a tremendous discipline to an individual MPP when he or she has to represent real people and a real part of this province, to be held accountable, and if he or she does not perform, then they quickly lose their privilege and honour of sitting in this place. That's why I reject any notion of unelected members through proportional representation.

**The Acting Speaker:** The member from Brampton Centre has two minutes for a response.

**Mrs. Jeffrey:** I'd like to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Parkdale–High Park, London–Fanshawe and Erie–Lincoln for their comments today on Bill 155.

I'd like to use the minute and a half or so that I have to thank Minister Marie Bountrogianni for giving me the opportunity to work on this bill. It's been a very interesting few months, and I've met some very interesting individuals to talk about democratic renewal. I want to thank her for the opportunity to do that. It's been very educational.

I'd also like to thank the chair of the citizens' assembly, Mr. George Thomson, who has spent innumerable hours working on this issue. Clearly, he feels that the work that the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has done is meaningful, and I think he's been impressed with the quality of person who has come forward and volunteered their time and their energy on this particular issue.

I'd also like, because I am the member from Brampton, to thank Theresa Vella from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale, Joyce Hughes from Brampton Centre and Mappanar Sundrelingam from Brampton West–Mississauga. Those are the three Brampton citizens' assembly members who gave up so many of their weekends; I appreciate that they did that. They clearly felt this was an important issue.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank the members of the students' assembly. This is a group of young people who gave up a lot of their time in a parallel process designed to complement the work of the citizens' assembly. That was a group of young Ontarians from 14 to 18 who clearly did not all know a lot about the electoral process but became so much better informed, so much more enthusiastic than a lot of people perhaps in this room on electoral reform, people who may have started out cynically but became enthusiastic about the process. I appreciate their entertaining that debate.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Mr. Sterling:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize your work on this as the critic with regard to the select committee on electoral reform. I look forward to hearing your remarks, perhaps on another day, with regard to this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Durham East, should there be any time left.

Our belief, as we wrote in the dissenting report of the select committee almost a year ago now, was that the cynicism, the mistrust, the lack of confidence in this place and in the politicians does not stem from the way we elect our provincial members of Parliament. That lack of interest in voting, that lack of interest in being involved in the public process of electing people, stems from what we do after we are elected and arrive in this place. It stems from the way this institution runs and is reported to the people by the media as to how this place runs.

It's somewhat ironic that the Liberal Party of Ontario would portray themselves as revamping, or this even being any kind of democratic reform. In fact, the select committee said, as a matter of whole, that electoral reform, as opposed to parliamentary reform, is unlikely to solve the problems in our parliamentary system. All it's going to do is split this place up into a number of more parties, if we go to a mixed-member proportional system, and ensure that Ontario will govern under minority Parliaments ad nauseam into the future. It will be impossible to attain a majority in this place, given the past voting records of the public over the last 30 or 40 years. There is no party over the last 30 or 40 years that has attained a 50% majority overall from the voting public, yet we have had majority governments for most of that period of time.

Over my 30 years in this place, I have sat through majority governments, both on the government side and the opposition side, and I've sat through minority Parliaments on the government side and on the opposition side, and I believe that minority governments every so often

are not bad. But I also believe that, in the main, majority governments are necessary in order for government to be able to make decisions in a relatively short period of time in order to meet the dynamic province that we have.

The other problem I have with this democratic reform initiative by the government is that nobody is interested in this. I shouldn't say "nobody." There are a few people interested in it, but very, very few people. Prior to this citizens' assembly being set up, I've never had anybody coming into my particular office or even speaking to me at a social event who was upset with the way the 103 MPPs were elected in the last election. I've never had anybody say—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker:** Order, please. I know that a great deal of fun is being had after this long recess, but the member has the floor and I think he deserves your respect.

Please continue.

**Mr. Sterling:** I've never had anybody say that they were dissatisfied with the existing process. I think the reason that people probably like the present process is that it's relatively simple. You go into the polling booth, you see three or four names or whatever number of names on a ballot—normally, in my area, it's been four or five. There's the name of a party, which is not on the ballot—I think it should be on the ballot, but that's for another day—but they all represent one party or another and people elect them on that basis. That's the way we have carried on for almost 140 years since Confederation. Although there are problems always with politicians and the political system, it has generally served Ontario fairly well.

This lack of interest was evident. It was evident as we've gone through this process, because the people who have presented themselves at the various levels of opportunity to speak for the public have been the same groups that have come forward again and again. It is those people who represent minority interests who, for instance, have not been successful under the present electoral system. As some of the election officials told us in Ireland and Scotland, where you and I traveled, Mr. Speaker, in order to look at their particular other ways of electing politicians they are groups who want to manipulate the outcome. How they do that, of course, is through their political parties. They make a list, and if you're a good party member and you do in Parliament what the party wants you to do, you'll be on the list the next time.

1620

One of the very, very great problems with proportional representation or a list election is that the parties take a huge amount of control out of the hands of the elected members. Not long ago I sat with a delegation from a province in South Africa who were all members elected from lists. They made it quite clear to me that their independence, in terms of their decision as to what they were going to do in their legislature, was greatly constricted by their political parties. If they dared to step out of line, they would not be on the list next time through.

There are some real downsides to a change in our present system.

I said originally, a long time ago, when this process started down the road with regard to the citizens' assembly—and it is in our dissenting report written over a year ago—how could we possibly expect people, the citizens' assembly members, who had been kind enough to give up 18 weekends of their time, to come to a conclusion in the end that the present system was okay and that no change was needed? I've got to tell you, if I gave up 18 weekends of my time and got involved in all of the machinations of how different jurisdictions elect their elected representatives, I sure as heck would come up with a model that's different from the existing model because I would be convinced that the change I want is for the good.

The lack of interest that I mentioned before was not only evident to me in the last 30 years that I've served as an MPP in this place, but it was evident in the BC referendum as well. In the BC referendum, where they were able to attain 57% approval for a change to an STV system, a single transferable vote system, which probably nobody in the province understood save and except for their citizens' assembly, which recommended the STV system, nobody knew what they were voting for.

People will vote for a change in their electoral system if they are angry with the government. If the McGuinty government goes into the election on October 10—at least that's the date we have now for the next election. Who knows what it will be in the future? It was October 4 and now it's October 10. If they go into the polls on October 10 and the McGuinty government is, let's say, 20%, 25% in the polls, this referendum has a chance, whatever the question is, of passing, because people will not register their vote on the referendum necessarily on the basis of what in fact the change will be; it will be a protest vote against the existing political group that is in place. So this is a dangerous, dangerous exercise, and as such we in our party are most hesitant to support a 50%-plus-one kind of situation and therefore we do support the government with regard to 60%, because we believe that, as in the BC election, people will not be engaged in what the referendum question is and what it will actually mean in terms of their life. They won't understand that it will lead to minority governments ad nauseam into the future. They won't understand that there will be two kinds of MPPs: those who represent a single constituency and those who will have no place that they will have to go home to on the weekends to talk to their people and will be representing a larger area. They don't understand that parties like the Green Party in Scotland will not put their candidates in the constituency elections but will say to the people, "Give Norm Sterling your first vote and give us your second vote in terms of the list vote." They will be able to concentrate all of their effect on the second kind of voting and therefore will gain support in that area, and will not necessarily represent what, in fact, the people want in terms of their representation. So it leaves the political parties, when you get into these other

kinds of machinations as to how to vote, much more power and much more strategy and much more manipulation of what the result may or may not be.

So I truly believe that this process, number one, was not called for by the people of Ontario but that the people of Ontario are, in fact, fairly well satisfied with the existing system that we presently have. Be that as it may, we're going to have this referendum that will be coming down the road.

I want to predict what's going to happen during the election. What's going to happen during the election is, there's not going to be any debate about this because, as in British Columbia, the politicians who are running for the constituency seats didn't enter into the debate. Why would you get into an issue with your people about whether you were for or against the referendum when, number one, they're not very much interested in the referendum question and, number two, you might give them the wrong answer and they were going to vote for you? So they've decided on what they're going to do in the referendum but they might change their vote on you, even though that is not really relevant to what happens. What happened in the British Columbia referendum was, nobody talked about the issue. When the election commissioner came to the select committee, he talked about the lack of interest in the referendum. What he said was that—I forget the exact number of calls his election office received during the election, but it was something like these numbers: He received about 10,000 to 15,000 calls, I believe it was, with regard to the general running of the election; he received 500 calls with regard to the referendum. So the interest with regard to people trying to understand what the referendum was about was not there.

One of the things that he said was that there wasn't enough education. They handed out pamphlets to sort of tell people about it, but there was no concentrated effort on telling the people what, in fact, the referendum was about. I believe that my friend Mr. Prue, who is sitting in the chair, brought forward an amendment—and I have been a proponent of this as well—that if you're going to have a referendum, you should fund those Yes and No sides for that referendum. So there would be a debate, and at least people who would enter the polling station and vote for or against a referendum would have some idea about what they were going to enter into.

1630

Mr. Prue entered an amendment, which I supported, during the hearings on Bill 155, but which unfortunately was voted down by the majority government, against that kind of funding. In fact, it's ironic that here we are talking about democratic reform. In my view, democratic reform should include or should strive to include all members of the Legislature in the decision process. In other words, it doesn't matter whether you're a backbencher or over here in the opposition, or over there; there should be some give and take with regard to striking a piece of legislation. I thought that, of all the amendments put forward during the very brief committee

hearing we had on Bill 155—this bill—probably the most innocent one was with regard to the funding, and there was no give at all on the part of the government with regard to that.

So my view of the Liberal government at this time is that they really don't want to talk about changing how this place works. They don't want to go toward co-operative decision-making. They don't want to try to gain the confidence of the public with regard to saying to them, "Look, all of the members of Parliament, your member, whether he sits on one side of the House or the other, will have an effect on the final decisions." They didn't really want to do that.

When I go back to the lack of interest in Bill 155, we had set aside two days of hearings for the public to come in and have their opportunity to talk on this bill, and the committee could only find enough people to fill up half a day. So that's the kind of interest there is in this whole—

**Mr. Hudak:** Half a day?

**Mr. Sterling:** Half a day. So there were one and a half days that they closed down, and the members of the committee went home.

**Mr. Hudak:** They cancelled it.

**Mr. Sterling:** They cancelled the hearings, yes.

But at any rate, I think it's instructive to talk about some of the other amendments. I supported the amendment put forward by the New Democratic Party with regard to having this Legislative Assembly approve the wording of the question. I think it's absolutely essential that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario have a debate about the wording of the question and that there be a vote on that in this place. The government wouldn't accept that amendment. It's going to be the cabinet of Ontario, the Liberal Party of Ontario, which decides what the referendum question will be.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Sterling:** I don't know whether I'd take any ownership of that or not. I don't know whether they're going to slant that for their purposes or whether they're going to be fair about their particular question or whatever.

I believe that true parliamentary reform should be aimed at these particular areas: should be aimed at accountability of government, should be aimed at transparency of government, should be aimed at co-operative decision-making by all MPPs in this place, should be aimed at making the importance of spin as we see it on a daily basis, particularly from our health minister, less important than facts and numbers about what is happening to our services and the services we're trying to provide for the people of Ontario. I believe that parliamentary reform in this place, democratic reform, should make this place a more livable place for young women and men who have children to care for and are concerned about them. I believe that that kind of reform can be done, and can be done to make this a more livable place for us all to be involved in.

When I was the House leader for the governing party in 1997 to 1999, I brought forward an initiative in this

place to allow the government to send out a bill after first reading. The Mike Harris government used it on several occasions to send out bills after first reading. I can remember the opposition House leader at that time, Mr. Duncan, immediately saying, "No, no. We can't allow this, because it's a way of getting around debate in the Legislature." They were bound and determined they were going to force us to closure on every possible bill whether they supported it or didn't support it. But he finally figured out, after we talked about it, that this could prolong the process, rather than shorten the process. But that kind of process where you send a bill out after first reading, is something that should be used by this government more often. I think they may have used it once or twice in the whole time that they've been here, but they have not even used the present rules, the present process, to try to bring this place to more reasonable debate.

The beauty of sending a bill out after first reading is that the members go into the committee hearing, no amendment is out of order, the government and opposition parties are not locked into positioning themselves, and the members actually learn more about the legislation than they would on any other piece of legislation, because the public comes in and starts to talk about the different sections of the bill, and if the government finds that there are a lot of pressure points in a certain area, they simply bring in another bill and you go through the normal process of second reading. But if you read Hansard on second reading after a bill has been referred out after first reading, you will be amazed at the difference of quality of debate in this place, because the members who are sitting in the committee actually know what the bill is about and where the issues lie. That's a process that is there for us now to use, but it has been used very little by this government.

Democratic reform requires not only the governing party to participate; it requires all parties to participate. If you're going to have this place operate in a more reasonable and logical way, then that change has to be embraced by the opposition as well as the governing party. The opposition has to act with responsibility in debate. They have to be willing to give; they have to be willing to take. It has to be that way. Maybe some people think that after 30 years I should know better and say, "You can't have this kind of a Parliament here. You can't have that kind of thing. It is impossible in our system, because we have such an adversarial system here. There's so much spin, there are so few facts, that it's going to be difficult or impossible to change." I don't believe that. I still hold out hope that the people of Ontario will gain respect for this place and will gain respect for the members who don't get up and blather on about topics they have made no effort to research or review or put forward new ideas on.

I support some parts of Bill 155. I support the 60% threshold, primarily because I believe that the process, number one, is flawed in reaching the question; number two, I believe a higher threshold than 50% plus one is

necessary with regard to this kind of change in our electoral system. We all know that Canada almost fell apart on a 50%-plus-one vote with regard to the referendum and the separation of Quebec.

**1640**

When we're talking about issues of core change with regard to our parliamentary system, there has to be a higher threshold. I don't know whether it should have been 55%, 60% or whatever, but I do believe that a higher threshold can be justified with regard to it.

I lament the fact that we're going to spend \$6 million in order to come to the referendum question. I think Prince Edward Island did a much better job, where they simply had people who were involved in this particular area, experts and political scientists, come forward with some proposals and then that proposal was taken to the public.

I'm not certain that the 103 people who were picked at random are truly representative of a cross-section of Ontarians. There have been people who have criticized those particular people. I'm also aware that not all members of the citizens' assembly are still functioning. I understand that a number have quit—not formally but are just not going to the meetings anymore and are no longer participating in the process, believing either that the direction the committee is taking is wrong or that it has been taken over by special interests.

I really believe that this place is in bad need of reform. I believe that we should look at accountability; we should look at the role of our Speaker. I believe our Speaker does not have near the kind of power that he or she should have under our standing orders. I believe the Speaker should be able to say to a government member, "Your question has no urgency. It's not about your constituency. It's about trying to have a minister re-announce a program," and the Speaker should say to that member, "It's more appropriate that the minister stand up in ministerial statements and make that statement. Therefore, I will disallow your question," and move on to the next question. I believe he should allow a backbencher on the government side to ask a question if it's an urgent question, a real question to a minister about something that his constituents have to do or don't have to do, are in trouble or whatever.

When the government puts up four ministers on the same day and takes up 18 minutes of the minister's 20 minutes' allowance for minister statements, I believe the Speaker should be able to say to the opposition, "You don't have five minutes; you've got nine minutes to respond today because there have been four ministers' statements." I believe the Speaker should have that particular kind of power. I also believe that if a minister stands up and gives a two-minute statement, the opposition shouldn't have five minutes of response time; they should have maybe two minutes of response time.

I believe the Speaker should have much more discretion in running this place. I believe the Speaker should run the House leaders' meetings, as the Speaker does in Scotland. He should try to work out a schedule that is

reasonable for all parties and all members to put forward their arguments, but there would be more certainty as to the timing of events in this place and we would not have debate ad nauseam in this place where little new is put forward.

There are all kinds of opportunity in this place for renewal and reform, but that has to be done in a manner where, in fact, all members of this Legislature, and not only the governing party, have a say and have a debate over what those changes should be, even if they are part of a political platform of one party or another. We have not had that courtesy with regard to this particular matter in terms of electoral reform by this particular Liberal government.

The select committee, I might add, was only struck after people like myself continued to complain about the lack of consultation and the government had no other alternative—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Sterling:** —but to strike the select committee on electoral reform. I might add that that was a good thing for the government to do.

This government has not taken advantage of the existing standing orders. When I was first elected here in 1977, there were many select committees in this place. There was a select committee on education, a select committee on the environment. There were a number of various, different select committees, and that allowed not only government ministers but government backbenchers and opposition members to become very knowledgeable in different areas of interest and to actually contribute in a positive way.

There was nothing to prevent this government over the last four years from setting up a number of select committees. I hope that any new government that wins the next election—and I hope it's us—will set up a number of select committees so that members from all parties can contribute to the enhancement of different areas of interest and expertise in this place.

Democratic reform with regard to this bill, Bill 155, and electoral reform is not going to change one iota the composition of this place in terms of women and men, it will not change the interest of the public in our parliamentary institution, and it will not gain the respect of the public in our politicians and in our Parliament.

As I said at the beginning, this is a Liberal Party process. God bless them in it. But we, and I, will not be supporting Bill 155. This bill and this referendum have nothing to do with the objective the government set out at the beginning, and that is to enhance our parliamentary system and make people regain some of the trust that has been lost, particularly over the last three and a half years under this government, here in our Parliament.

So I would like to now end my remarks and turn it over to my good friend and colleague from Durham.

**The Acting Speaker:** Before I recognize the member from Durham, I've called for order several times but the

ministers are pretty loud. If they want to speak they can either do it outside or keep it to a whisper, please.

The member from Durham.

**Mr. O'Toole:** Indeed it's a pleasure to follow the member from Lanark–Carleton, Mr. Sterling, who is the senior member in this House. I do, in all seriousness, have great respect for the time and interest that he has shown in the work of the committee as well as the dissenting report and his contributions in the debates since October 2006, when this bill was introduced. He does take the matter seriously.

I think it is an important theme, because even the remarks he made, which I listened very closely to—he has spoken on the bill several times. Many of the things have been repeated several times, maybe the same speech in many cases, but the same arguments are consistent. And that's what Minister Bountrogianni said, as reported in the *Ottawa Citizen*. This is the day after the bill was introduced, actually, and this is quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen* article here. It says, "Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Marie Bountrogianni told the Legislature 'the adoption of a new electoral system would represent a foundational change to Ontario's democracy,' noting that the Liberal government has undertaken the exercise in an attempt to reduce voter cynicism and increase turnout."

**1650**

That's, in summation, kind of the whole substance of what the member from Lanark–Carleton said. Now, let's deal with the argument he was making, which is the point on the cynicism. In fact, I think the cynicism, as he said, is really the process: the orders in the House, the procedures in this place. I think that's probably the most important contribution to make. A lot of his ideas were quite substantive and I think, having been House leader and in other roles over his many years here, that's where the work could be done. I can see, as a member who has sat here for a third of the time he's been here—and it's moved very quickly—there is a set procedure that somehow often seems unproductive, even in terms of the daily order paper or the agenda that we all work to here every day. The arguments that he made, and the treachery by how this place—the mechanics themselves are orderly, but the exercise of that. In his final remarks he said that the government, whoever they are, are able to have ministerial statements, and they could have four or five of them, and then we get a total of five minutes to respond. It's almost tokenistic to be giving a member less than a minute to respond to a substantive statement by a minister and yet each minister can consume up to 10 or 15 minutes, I suppose. That is one point: simple mechanics where it would empower the Speaker—or indeed the Clerk of the Legislature could make an interpretation on some issues if called upon by the Speaker. That could be sorted out, the mechanics of all of that, to allow the place and the exercise of each member. But it does come down to that whole argument that the business of the House is where this could be sorted out.

In looking over the debate on this, I would say that first of all I met with the citizens' assembly reps in my

area. I looked on the Internet to see who they were, and introduced myself. I didn't in any way imply any implication that I was trying to be interfering. I thought it was my responsibility to know those persons who assumed some role in our riding. I don't care what role they are; I would expect intelligent people to act independently, not in accordance with anything that I said specifically. But it is an important change, as was said in the article that I cited. It's a fundamental change, and that's another part of the arguments that Mr. Sterling was making. What the member for Lanark–Carleton was saying, quite frankly, was, “Is the system broken?” Yes, there could be repairs and accountability and transparency, but you know, there's a general vote, and I think that some of the review of the committee looked at other jurisdictions that have other outcomes, how effective those Parliaments or those Houses of governance operate. I draw no profound conclusion on my part, but from the research—it's the best of a bad lot, I suppose—it's the best we've got. Often in making decisions patience is important.

I want to mention the name here without getting off the record too much. Margo Bath is the Durham riding member on the citizens' assembly and, I had given her an opportunity. She said they weren't getting enough voice. In fact, the two or three meetings in Durham were actually held before Christmas—long before Christmas, long before anyone knew. This thing was introduced on October 24 or 25, whatever the date was—October 24. They had meetings in November. There were 13 people at the meetings and she was quite disappointed, whether it was apathy or whether it was just plain indifference. But I felt that it was the lack of information. In fact, she didn't raise any complaints except she felt very enthusiastic about, first of all, being selected randomly.

Secondly, she thought that it was an important responsibility or privilege to have a voice in that and wondered why she was there. So I said, “You could come to my annual levee, which is held in January. It's a non-partisan event,” and it is. In fact, the mayors have one. I've had one for 12 years and always participated in them in the 10 or so years that I was involved in council. So it is not something new. It is a great time to meet, in a non-partisan way, citizens who are interested in the public process. Let's leave it at that. I treat it as such.

In fact, this year the Durham Youth Orchestra was the backdrop for the levee, and I asked Margo Bath if she would like to address those attendees, which she did. I didn't give her a script, nor would I even expect that she would think I would try to influence her in any way. She brought with her a couple of students from the various high schools who were involved in this citizens' assembly process. I found it quite refreshing, with the Durham Youth Orchestra playing, with Ms. Bath speaking in an open way about how important it was for the people's franchise to vote. It was an important contribution to the levee in my riding of Durham, so I'd just say that.

I think of other persons who, through a process of public participation, are recognized citizens who think

that the current system is fine and often have said to me, “It's important, John, that you represent us.” I think it then comes down to the next level that the member for Lanark–Carleton was trying to make: It's important for the members to be accountable in their actions here and the role and the voice they bring on behalf of all of their constituents to this assembly. That could be dealt with, as the point has been made, by their actions and the standing orders here that determine the agenda of the day.

I, myself, have had the privilege of being in a few other countries. More recently, in December, I was in London, where my daughter had her first child; I think I said that before Christmas here. I went to Westminster and to the House of Lords. I didn't want to babysit all the time I was there. It was quite interesting, because the debates were very similar to the issues we're hearing. I did notice a couple of things. I did get a copy of their order paper, and the sequence of events was much like here. I had a chance to meet a number of members in their dining room and talk to them about the issues and process. One of the most important differences I noticed, quite frankly, was that the questions are written in advance and given to the minister and they get a response, not the blah, blah, blah that we get from George Smitherman and Dalton McGuinty. We never got that from Mike Harris. He actually—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. O'Toole:** To get back on topic, the process here is quite different, where often the question is off—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker:** I have been reminded, and the reminder is correct, that you must refer to members either by their ministry or by their riding and not by name.

**Mr. O'Toole:** I often want to recognize the member from Peterborough, but he's so infrequently here that it's hard sometimes to do.

**The Acting Speaker:** I would remind the member that you cannot comment on the attendance or non-attendance of any member, and I think you should retract that.

**Mr. O'Toole:** Yes, I retract that because, quite frankly, all members who are in the House deserve to be recognized when they're here, certainly. That's the point I was trying to make. It's great that people were actually listening to what I was saying, which is a nice compliment to the process.

What I was trying to say is that citizens, in the broadest sense, do like to be respected for their participation in their community. For that part, I want to thank Margo for her participation and the students and the community that have participated in the process.

When you come to the concluding remarks that the member from Lanark–Carleton was trying to make—is the system broken? His leading argument was that they're expected almost to come up with one of these new, revised systems. It's almost inherent in saying, “Here's your mandate. Change the system.” I heard that their opening meetings started off by saying that the current system is broken; I had people tell me this personally. I suspect that you shouldn't lead the debate



when you're asking for input, as you're asking for our input as opposition.

I know there was a dissenting report. Mr. Prue and Mr. Sterling probably spent, as members of that committee, a lot of thoughtful time to make some observations.

I just want to mention again—this may be slightly off the debate, but it is important to mention—that leadership in my community takes many forms. Certainly I feel privileged to be here, but there are other people who do other things that are important, and that's why I listen to what my constituents tell me, which empowers me to say what many times I say here. For instance, the Rotary Club in most of our communities are important leaders who volunteer and are community builders—service above self. I have spoken to three or four Rotary Clubs in my riding of Durham over the last intersession between Christmas and now. They have what they call the four questions of truth. I think it's very important that all members should read it—

**Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough):** It's the four-way test.  
1700

**Mr. O'Toole:** A four-way test of truth is what it is. I think that's important.

I attended an event which was the Paul Harris awards. One of the persons was just a citizen at large, but I knew her when I was a local councillor, a regional councillor, as being the head of the women's institute—just a wonderful, wonderful person. "Partisan" means nothing. The politics is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about people's views that I listened to. She said that traditions are so important, that we need to protect them but we can always improve them. That was Vi Ashton. Another person I had spent some time with when I was a library trustee, before I was even elected in 1982, is Pat Best, a well-known artist and a wonderful, wonderful lady, but also a leader and a voice for the community. I think it's important to listen to these people. Those people are as important, no less or no more, as Margo, is my point.

I would love to have been empowered as a member independently. This could have happened by McGuinty's orders or the terms of reference for this process. Mr. Sterling was saying pretty much the same thing. The attempt to consult with members could have been thought about more comprehensively, to solicit. It could easily be dismissed if it was just a political rant that I submitted. But when I think of who I would have contacted—I'm going through that name list—it would be substantive, as was the case when we were government and we had the International Year of Older Persons. We were all given a certain sum of money to work with our community partners. That was a terrific process; it really was. I went to the hospital foundations and the various leaders in the community and we took the \$20,000 and made it into about \$250,000 by them raising funds to build memorial gardens or whatever it was.

The point I'm making is, I don't think the process was anything more than a checkbox, that we'd got it done. I become even more cynical when I look at the legislation itself. The double-threshold issue is one of the most

cynical thresholds—now, whether it's right or whether I agree with the number is not the point. They're the government; they're accountable for the legislation that they present to the people as a democratic renewal debate. It's anything but that. It's a failed outcome. It's a planned failure.

If you look at the editorial interpretations of this—that's what I'm reading from. I'm reading from Murray Campbell, a person who I think writes subjectively and intelligently, in his article in the *Globe* on October 26. I still go back to my community, as it being in the best interests of the public, when you think that all politics is local, as has been said by many, many of the people who have stood on this floor.

I think of persons like Kevin Anyan, who has been president of the Rotary Club, whom I've gotten to know. I think of Al Strike. Any fundraising event for building a hospital wing, for building an arena, for helping Boy Scouts—he was on the Trillium Foundation—he's a great citizen; the politics means nothing.

I'm saying, these are the people I would consult with to make a valid contribution to this important and, as the minister said, fundamental change, to democracy or the democratic process. That would have been true democratic renewal, to respect our role as members and expect—at least entrust us to go to our communities to look for and examine, from a range of people, some options to look forward to.

I could simply sum up by saying that the member from Lanark—Carleton, in the dissenting report—his comments in October of last year and his comments today really said the same thing: We should look at the standing orders themselves, to see what would have been a better way to improve the outcome of this process.

I really do want to make some reference to—this may be the only political part of what I say. First of all, you've got to trust the motives. Sometimes it's important for leaders like Premier McGuinty to establish trust first. This is what has become, and remains, troubling today. Leadership must be first and foremost about trust and integrity. That would apply to anyone who presents themselves as leadership.

How would one measure that characteristic or quality of trust in leadership? I looked at the election material that was presented to the people of Ontario, and then I looked at the outcomes. I became more and more cynical as I moved along, because I remembered that the very first thing they did, quite frankly, was to break their promise, with the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario, now a big argument by George Smitherman, as if it is a centrepiece of his argument, the \$2.5 billion—

**The Acting Speaker:** If you want to refer to the Deputy Premier or if you want to refer to the Minister of Health, you should do so. I caution: Please use the title.

**Mr. O'Toole:** The member from Beaches—East York—Deputy Speaker—I'll try and get all these titles lined up here.

The Deputy Premier today—because the Premier wasn't here; he was off doing something else, I'm sure. But the Deputy Premier was here.

**Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre):** Is that George Smitherman?

**Mr. O'Toole:** The member from Welland–Thorold is telling me it's Mr. Smitherman. I guess the point I'm trying to make there would be that when you want to establish respect and trust, you look to a person's record. If you want to know the future, you should look to the past. And I have, quite frankly, a litany of failed commitments. This is what's most troubling about the relationship of leadership with the people and, as Minister Bountrogianni, the minister of democratic renewal, said, the cynicism. Who is responsible for that cynicism? That's the point that was made during her introduction of the bill: to correct that.

The very first things they did—the list is so long it is heartbreaking, quite frankly. I intend to repeat this as frequently as possible, with as much dignity and respect as it deserves.

The four-way test is a good example. The truth is something that I think responds to this whole thing of the cynicism and trust arguments that were made by the minister. I look at the raised taxes, the rolling back, the 407, the health tax, the provincial debt, the failed commitment on autism, the failed commitment for long-term care—still there on Bill 140—the autism argument, the P3 hospitals. The cynicism is in the execution of their plan.

So when you say you have got democratic renewal, look to the history. And then you look at the cynicism, the 60% threshold. Don't trust a single word the person over there says. Quite frankly, I get so upset because it is difficult to argue logistically or rationally with someone who fails to communicate with integrity and trustworthiness. That's an important characteristic, and, if you want, the people of Ontario, the people of Canada, indeed, don't trust the leadership. Look in the mirror. When asking a question, do you get an answer? Look at Hansard today, to the Deputy Premier's responses to the children's mental health questions, to the \$10-an-hour question that was raised. The answers are almost cynical themselves. No wonder the people have lost faith. And this bill does nothing but reinforce the chicanery of this process, of what they are actually trying to do.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. O'Toole:** "Treachery" perhaps would be a better and more exact word.

I'm repeating—I think it's best to go to third sources—what Murray Campbell said here: "Legislation introduced yesterday"—this is on October 25, 2006—"would require the endorsement of 60%" of those ballots cast, so it's 60% of every ballot cast, plus "50% support in a minimum of 64 constituencies" of 108 constituencies. So that's a double threshold, technically. It's designed to fail, as Murray Campbell said.

1710

If you want to ask for honest feedback—otherwise I can finish up the debate now and support the observations of the member from Lanark–Carleton, who made similar arguments. I just brought some other perspectives

to it, so I ask all members to recognize how important this is, as the minister said. The debate on democratic renewal should start right in this place itself, perhaps even with me and each one of us here today. He who has not failed, stand up. Quite frankly, every person makes mistakes.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. O'Toole:** Mr. McNeely, the member from Ottawa–Orléans, has just barked over there as well, and I'm quite surprised. What he's saying here to me now is, as I understand it, that he hasn't made any mistakes. It's interesting that he would say that. It's good to have on the record that he says he hasn't made any mistakes.

The point I'm making here is that I'm standing to say that this particular discussion today—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. O'Toole:** We have another person barking over there. The member from Nipissing has had lots to say on this. I'm surprised that they're trying to, quite frankly—

**Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't believe that "barking" is parliamentary language.

**The Acting Speaker:** I'm not sure about the parliamentary nature, but I think it is an unfortunate term and perhaps that should be withdrawn.

**Mr. O'Toole:** I'll withdraw that and just say "barrack-ing." But it was not and should not be intended that way. I would just say that those were comments being fired back to me and I was responding to them as it should be, I suppose, if there is a debate and if they're indeed engaged in listening and hopefully taking some reflection on the comments I've made on the trust and integrity issue that I try to bring to the debate, and somewhat on a sensitive matter reflecting on how the minister introduced the bill and how the members here today have responded to any sort of criticism to their way or that only they know best.

If the system is broken, I would expect someone in their two-minute response to explain the evidence that the system is broken and some way to improve it. If I were to look at some of the systems that have been suggested and describe them: It's the alternative majority where the voters would rank all candidates in order of preference and a candidate must get 50% plus one to vote. Proportional representation would select a party. Seats are allocated according to the proportion of votes that the party received. In a mixed-member proportional, voters cast two votes on one ballot, one for the party and one for the candidate.

So what we're doing is taking the simple exercise of me going in, being familiar with the plan, the promises made and the trustworthiness of the candidate that said it, whether they have that trustworthiness or not, and casting a single ballot. It has worked rather successfully for a couple of hundred years, and they are suggesting to us that it is broken. I am putting to you that it isn't the system that's broken. Perhaps it's the system in here, whether it's me or others, and the debate and often the futility of the questions in the Legislature and how well

that system itself works. So I leave that, as I wouldn't be supporting this bill based on those premises, those arguments.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Mr. Kormos:** I'm grateful for the participation in this debate by the member for Lanark–Carleton, who's known in his riding, of course, as Norm Sterling and extremely well known as being a long-serving member, Mr. Sterling is, and indeed the dean of this Legislature, joined by his colleague from Oshawa—Durham, Mr. O'Toole. I almost incorrectly identified his riding. It's Mr. O'Toole.

I'm grateful for their participation in the debate. People should be very careful as they're listening to this debate, because what we've got here is some real bait and switch on the part of the Liberals. Three and a half years later, darned near four years later, you can't trust them any more than you could a year ago, two years ago or three years ago. As a matter of fact, you could probably trust them even less. And let me tell you, that takes the trust level to pretty—we're down to the basement then. excavating. We're digging up clay sewer pipe. That's how far down you are in the trust level when it comes to Liberals here at Queen's Park.

I'm going to have a chance to speak to this bill in around eight minutes' time. Ms. DiNovo, the member from Parkdale–High Park, is going to be speaking to the comments made by Mr. Sterling and Mr. O'Toole, the members from Lanark–Carleton and Durham, respectively. I, of course, look forward to the lead speech by our member from Beaches–East York, Michael Prue, who is an expert in this whole issue of proportional representation and who has provided counsel to this caucus.

I want to tell you that we oppose this legislation. This legislation is a sham. It's a hoax on the people of Ontario. I have a chance to speak to it in yet a few minutes. I'm looking forward to it.

**Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture):** I am pleased to be able to respond to the members from Lanark–Carleton and Durham. It's important to note that there is interest in this topic. I say this because I certainly went in my riding, when the citizens' assembly came to the riding, and found that there was a really interesting and engaged citizenry that wanted to talk about this. I also found that in a current poll that was done, an SES Research-Osprey Media poll, six out of every 10 voters who were surveyed in this province think it's time to look at changing the way MPPs are elected at Queen's Park. That's a huge number.

As you know, Speaker, we sat on the select committee on electoral reform, as did the member from Lanark–Carleton. Certainly we learned a great deal about various systems and know that there is no panacea in changing a system, because every system has its pros and cons. But having this conversation after, I believe, 215 years is important in a healthy democracy. The process in this bill is just to put in place the steps for a referendum if the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform should recom-

mend that Ontario change the way members of this Legislature are elected. I think that's a good process, to have a referendum, in case they do want to change and take a significant step in changing our system.

**Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge):** I am most pleased to comment on the speeches of my good friends and colleagues from Lanark and Durham—I think I've got them straight—because this is a very important issue. We're about to decide, conceivably, through a referendum, the electoral process in Ontario and the reform of same.

In that regard, I think everyone should be familiar now with the citizens' assembly. A citizens' assembly has been established representing 103 current ridings. These citizens are required to meet two weekends a month until May 15, 2007. As you heard, some of the citizens may not choose to meet according to the requirements for one reason or another, including disillusionment in the process. These individuals are paid a stipend, so they are not doing it as volunteers. My riding is so strong in volunteers, I'm used to volunteers assisting our community, but these citizens are in fact paid a stipend, which is \$150 per day plus travel and accommodation. Both of my colleagues have pointed out our party's concern with this particular act and, further, the process. Whether it will enhance or act to the detriment of our democracy remains to be seen.

**1720**

**Ms. DiNovo:** I would like to address the comments that were made by our Minister of Culture or, I should say, their Minister of Culture. Having the conversation—

**The Acting Speaker:** I would remind the member that you are commenting on the speakers, not someone who has commented on the speakers.

**Ms. DiNovo:** Having the conversation is all that these poor folk who are involved in the citizens' assembly are going to be able to have because of Bill 155. They actually thought that they would get a say, and that their say was worth something. I had a young teacher, who is our member in the citizens' assembly, come into my office. She felt absolutely betrayed by Bill 155. She felt as if all the work that she'd done, which is equivalent, really, to getting a master's in political science, was just going to go out the window because of this cut-off of 60%. I think that if you asked any group of people, just about anywhere, what they felt a majority was, they would answer with the commonsense response that a majority is 50% plus one. Yet here we have—not only here, of course, but in BC too where 58% of the people effectively had their votes nullified because they didn't reach that magic 60%, and then the government turned around and only got in the 40s to get re-elected.

I also wanted to correct something that the Liberal member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale, Mr. Kular, said. Actually, the McGuinty Liberals won 46% of the votes in 2003, and the Harris Conservatives won 45% of the votes in 1995 and 1999. So here we have a classic case in this very House, in this very Legislature, where the 60% cut-off wouldn't have worked for either of these governments.

So, again, what we're talking about, what we're asking for here is a real referendum. If we're going to have a citizens' assembly, if they're going to spend the time, then let's give them some time and let's give them a real vote.

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Lanark–Carleton has two minutes in which to respond.

**Mr. Sterling:** I would like to thank all members for responding to our remarks. My belief is that we really, truly do need democratic reform for this institution in order to gain the respect and the confidence of the people of Ontario, and to get people back involved in the electoral process. This is not going to make one scintilla of difference. In fact, it has the reverse effect. It could lead to more cynicism when people find that the people who are running their province are not directly elected and not directly accountable. That's a debate for another time.

I would also like to acknowledge, however, the Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco. I think it should be noted that she was the chair of the select committee on electoral reform, and I found that her understanding and her involvement in this democratic reform initiative was probably the most exemplary of all of the government in this regard. She did her job without prejudice, and I want to thank her publicly for what she did with regard to that process. I only wish that the Premier and the present minister would have treated the subject as she did in that select committee.

**The Acting Speaker:** Time for further debate.

**Mr. Kormos:** I seek unanimous consent for the New Democratic Party lead to be held down.

**The Acting Speaker:** Is it agreed that the lead be held down? Agreed.

**Mr. Kormos:** Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Unfortunately, the critic for the New Democratic Party, the member for Beaches–East York, is sitting in the chair today and, while in the House, because he's in the chair, cannot do his one-hour lead in criticism of this bill, which is why we sought and are grateful for the unanimous consent given by all members permitting him to do his lead on yet another occasion when this bill is called.

There won't be very many more occasions when this bill is called; people should understand that very clearly. This is third reading. The end is near. The government, the Liberals at Queen's Park, were oh so unresponsive to members of the public who appeared before the standing committee expressing concern about the government drafting of Bill 155 and the betrayal by the government of people in Ontario who were sincerely committed to and interested in participating in, as citizenry, as residents, as voters, as taxpayers, a reform of the political process that makes it more representative, more accessible, and, one would hope, more democratic.

I want to commend the select committee and the New Democratic Party member for Beaches–East York. It's well known that Michael Prue was, of course, on that committee. That committee had a rigorous schedule of

visiting a modest number of PR—proportional representation—jurisdictions, talking to politicians, bureaucrats, analysts, political scientists in those communities. They did a tremendous amount of work in relatively short order and made some very sound recommendations. This tripartite committee made some very important recommendations, some very effective ones.

The tripartite committee recommended that the threshold for a referendum be 50% plus one, a majority, a principle that is deeply entrenched, rooted in democracy.

It would also have been the wish and desire, and it certainly is of New Democrats, that if this referendum process is going to be a meaningful one in which all Ontarians can participate in an effective way—let's understand, there are going to be some very high-priced hill and knoll type campaigns being launched by some very powerful interests, aren't there, Ms. Di Novo? And it's imperative, New Democrats say, if the citizenry, if folks out there—voters, residents, taxpayers—are going to be able to participate meaningfully in a referendum campaign and debate, that there be funding for those efforts. Let's understand—and we'll talk about the remarkable threshold in just a minute. But let's understand that this referendum, if this bill passes—and, oh, I tell you, it will, because the Liberals have a majority in the House that they are not afraid to mobilize and use even if their majority vote is contrary to the will and the well-being and the interests of the people of the province, and this Liberal majority government isn't afraid at all to use time allocation to guillotine debate, to shut it down.

Why, on a bill as important as reform of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, on a debate as relevant as a debate around human rights, this government—didn't they, Ms. DiNovo? —guillotined debate, slammed the door in the faces of hundreds of Ontarians who had been promised an opportunity to make submissions to the legislative committee.

**1730**

So here is a very and most undemocratic government daring to talk about democratic reform, but when we look at the details—you don't even have to look at the fine print—there's nothing democratic and there's nothing reform-bent about this legislation at all.

I do want to thank the parliamentary assistant, Ms. Jeffrey, from Brampton Centre because she, of course, in the time-honoured tradition, is sitting with the debate on this bill here in the Legislature. As we all know, it's been a tradition here in this Legislature, as it is in most, that either the minister or his or her parliamentary assistant not only lead in the debate, but then remain present through the debate. So I want to commend the parliamentary assistant, the member for Brampton Centre, Ms. Jeffrey. I suspect that the parliamentary assistant knows that this government's threshold around a referendum is flawed, but of course she's paid to say that it isn't, isn't she, Speaker? She has a job that makes her responsible for trying to justify this legislation.

Let's understand that if the bill passes, there will be a referendum. Now, will the question that's going to be put

on the referendum be decided by this House, by this chamber? Will it decide in the same way that the tripartite select committee was able to sit down, work collaboratively, and arrive at recommendations that were unanimously supported—weren't they, Speaker? Unanimous: all three parties. Is this chamber going to have an opportunity to entertain a motion wherein the question that will be put will be presented, and there will be opportunities for people to make amendments to that motion such that there can be some fine-tuning of the question to be put? No. And there's no safeguard. The legislation says that the wording of the referendum question shall be clear, concise and impartial. But, hell's bells, if at the end of the day it's none of those, there's no recourse by anybody about the legitimacy of the question, is there? None whatsoever. The legislation says the wording shall be clear. It could be the muddiest wording in the world, because there's nothing anybody here or outside of here can do about it. It could be anything but concise, and there's nothing anybody here or out there can do about it. It could be anything but impartial, and there's nothing anybody here or out there can do about it.

At the very worst, there could be some futile litigation, which I suspect will be to no avail, because, you see, the legislation lets the government determine the question to be put on the referendum in the dark rooms, in the bowels, back in the smoke-filled sanctuary, in the halls of the power brokers, with no public debate, no public scrutiny, no legislative scrutiny. This in and of itself demonstrates this government's complete lack of commitment to democratic reform. If anything, it illustrates that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals have nothing but disdain and scorn for the democratic process and revel in the freedom of the backrooms and the secret deals with who knows what private interest is out there.

Let's take a look at the threshold. Is it a democratic threshold of 50% plus one? In other words, if 50% plus one of the voters in the province of Ontario approve or don't approve the referendum question, is that conclusive? No. What has the Liberal government done in their effort to quash, to silence, to snuff out the very prospect of democratic reform? They've created that 60% threshold. The result of the referendum is binding, and we'll get to what it binds the government to do because that, at the end of the day, is the total illustration of how this government is mocking the people of Ontario with this legislation, because if the referendum passes it doesn't really require the next government to do anything. Let me get to that in just a minute. For it to pass, it would need 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast. In other words, at least 60% of all votes in Ontario have to support the referendum proposal. But that's not good enough. It also requires that 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in each of at least 64 electoral districts—in other words, you know what they are saying, don't you? In at least half of the electoral districts in Ontario—more than half—there has to be 50%-plus-one support, and across the province there has to be 60%.

**Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs):** That's it: double majority.

**Mr. Kormos:** "Double majority," Mr. Ramsay says, in criticism of the legislation—an astute member. By considering his political background, I can understand why he would have a little more sensitivity to true democracy than some of his colleagues and I appreciate his input into this debate.

But having said all that, what does a successful referendum campaign do for the people of Ontario when it comes to democratic reform, when it comes to proportional representation? Why, it requires the government of the day to introduce legislation before December 2008; in other words, before December of the next year. It doesn't require them to call it for second or third reading. It doesn't require them to put it to committee. It doesn't require them to pass it.

Let's look at how cynical that was. It was but a few months ago that one newly elected Conservative Prime Minister said, "Oh yes, to appease the ultra rightists, the cranky old men and, I suppose, women of the Reform Party around the issue of same-sex marriage, we'll put the question before the House," but of course knowing full well that the question wouldn't pass because even Conservatives wouldn't vote for it, would they?

You see, the government elected in October 2007 is not compelled to pass any legislation; it's compelled to put the bill forward. If there is a political party that has a majority in the House that does not support proportional representation, they will be compelled to put the bill forward but won't be compelled to even call it for second reading. And there is not a damned thing anybody here or out there is going to be able to do about it, is there? Nothing.

You've been had. You've been taken to the cleaners. You've been mugged. You've been rolled in an alleyway and had your pockets emptied. The Dalton McGuinty Liberals have grabbed you by the ankles, turned you upside down and shaken every last nickel and dime out of you. And then McGuinty's Liberals roll you into the gutter and have the audacity to stuff a little Liberal fundraiser pamphlet in your pocket. You've been slapped six ways to Sunday by these Liberals, and Dalton McGuinty and his gang expect you to be grateful. Good Lord, I thought the Senate was a gaggle of horse thieves, ne'er-do-wells and ill-deservers. They pale in comparison to the Liberals at Queen's Park—incredible. This is a totally new definition for chutzpah. The word has been redefined: a 60% threshold, 50% in at least 50% of the ridings, and then even if the referendum question is approved, the government doesn't have to do diddly-squat. It can, as was suggested earlier by the Deputy Premier, sit on its hands or, as we say down in Welland and Niagara where I come from, twist and twirl. It's true.

**1740**

New Democrats aren't going to support this. This is less than a joke. There are folks out there who believe sincerely that we need some dramatic reform of our

political system if we're going to make it more representative, if we're going to make it fairer, if it's going to work more effectively for people to abandon their cynicism about it, and if in fact the citizenry—the people of this province, the residents of this province, the voters of this province, the taxpayers of this province—are going to feel respected enough to participate and involve themselves with the political process, with the parliamentary process.

There is a huge opportunity for all of us to make that happen. New Democrats, I tell you—make no mistake about it—don't need a referendum to tell them where they stand on an issue. New Democrats have been leading the fight for proportional representation here in the province of Ontario, with Jack Layton and predecessors before him across the country, haven't they? Because New Democrats vote. Do you want to get more women into this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to get more ethnic diversity in this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to make sure that underrepresented groups, underrepresented constituencies out there from all parts of Ontario are represented in this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to make sure that every vote counts? Proportional representation.

New Democrats have adopted, as policy, effective proportional representation, and we haven't left ourselves the wiggle room that the Liberals do. But oh, my goodness, let's make one thing perfectly clear. If we haven't learned anything yet, we surely have learned this: The nice thing about being a Liberal is you don't always have to be a Liberal. They demonstrate it on a daily basis. They campaign like New Democrats; they govern like Tories. They cross the floor. Heck, walking from the Liberal side to the Tory side, Tory side to the Liberal side, you don't know who is who any more. Is it Belinda? Is it Mr. Khan? I don't know. You can't tell one from the other, can you?

This is a shameful hoax. This is a very sad day. New Democrats are prepared to sit in this Legislature until May, when the constituency week is, and we're prepared to come after the constituency week. Because just as every New Democrat is prepared to stand, be counted and be heard on this incredible insult to the people of Ontario—Bill 155—we are prepared to give every single Liberal in this chamber the same opportunity—aren't we, Ms. DiNovo?

**Ms. DiNovo:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Kormos:** If that means we have to sit an extra day—or two days or three days or four days or five days—to accommodate Liberals whose constituents deserve to know where they stand on 60% plus 50% or 50% thresholds, New Democrats are going to work hard to make sure that those Liberals have that chance.

More importantly, we're prepared to let Liberals stand up and explain why even if a hard-fought referendum battle is successful for the advocates of proportional representation, that means dip, zip, nada, nothing, zero to the next government elected in October 2007. You can fight your hearts out in the course of a referendum debate

and battle and end up with nothing—and nothing is what you get from the Liberals. Don't even think of asking for anything more.

New Democrats, by the way, aren't going to be supporting Bill 155.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Mrs. Jeffrey:** I'm glad to join this debate again. I guess that I can appreciate the member from Niagara Centre's passion, but I don't share his cynicism. I wanted to enter the conversation and talk about something that I was refreshed by during the course of the debate on Bill 155, and that was the activity that the student assembly carried out. I think all of us, at some point, got to hear about our students. They were 14 to 18. They were enthusiastic and passionate. They spent a considerable amount of time learning about the inner workings of the electoral process and the system. They were enthusiastic and engaged. They have lots of good ideas, and I am encouraged by the thousands of young Ontarians who have brought this discussion to their schools. Even though they knew that what they were doing was only going to be taken as a recommendation by the citizens' assembly, they threw their very heart into it.

I appreciate that it was an original idea. It was a made-in-Ontario solution, and there are other jurisdictions that are looking at what happened with the student assembly in Ontario. There were 103 student members. I had one in Brampton Centre. They went back to their schools and talked about it in their classrooms with their teachers. Their teachers were engaged. They tried to get programming that helped students understand. I'm sure they took that home and talked to their parents, who may have been cynical about the electoral system. I, for one, am not. I believe that that participation is really important. Now that the students are involved, I hope their parents will be less cynical or skeptical about our political future.

Young people carry a special weight. They represent the voice of young Ontarians. Young Ontarians have a lot to add to this debate, and I think they are engaged. I think there are people out there watching to see if we can deliver what we promised. We have opened the debate. I'm not cynical about it. I trust Ontarians to come to this thoughtfully and carefully, and I look forward to their recommendations.

**Ms. DiNovo:** I thank particularly my colleague from Niagara Centre for his impassioned defence of democracy, which is what it amounts to, in this House.

Clearly, unlike Ms. Jeffrey from Brampton Centre, the real cynics here are the Liberals and this Liberal government. They're cynical about their own electorate. They're cynical about democracy, and they're cynical about their citizens' assembly. They're even, as I said at the top of this hour, cynical about their own select committee on electoral reform, a committee upon which Caroline Di Cocco, Minister of Culture, sat and voted for 50% plus one.

You also heard my colleague speak about the fact that this is going to hurt women and ethnic minorities as well as the electorate in general and democracy in general,

and there's a very good example of how that works. For example, should this assembly go for a mixed-member proportional electoral system and follow the example of Wales and Scotland, they would see the proportional representation of women go up, as it did in Scotland perhaps, from 10% to 48%, or in Wales where it went from 15% to 20% right up to 52%. They don't want to see that. They speak about women's rights, but they don't want to see actual women's rights in government; otherwise they'd let this citizens' assembly do its job and actually go ahead with the 50% plus one rather than, as you heard my colleague speak about it, the impossible 60% plus 60% of ridings, this impossible task, and then, as you heard Mr. Kormos from Niagara Centre say, there's no compunction upon them to act even then.

**Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville):** It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I think from some of the previous comments, people at home must be really wondering exactly what we're talking about. It's probably essential to this debate that we get back to why we're having this debate in the first place. It allows the people of the province of Ontario, for the first time in their history, to take a look at the way we're governed. We can sit here and argue about the nuances and whether it should be 60% or 50% or whether it should be half the ridings or simple majority plus one. The concept, the idea, is that some people in the past have said that they don't believe the current system serves them well. Other people have said that the current system is fine; leave it as it is. It appears that in the middle, the vast majority of people feel that perhaps there should be some changes considered to the system. Perhaps we should take a look at some of the other systems that are used around the world and see if any one of those systems could be brought into place in the province of Ontario in a way that will serve future generations the way the previous one has in the past for all of us here and for the people that came before us. We have set out a process that would allow that to happen. We have gone to the people, asked them to take a look at other systems that exist around the world. Actually, using the system we have, one of the first things that you find out is that we're in a minority in this country and province in the system that we use. There are other systems in the world that actually use much different systems and still achieve a democratic system.

What I don't think is fair to the 103 people that we've asked—ordinary people from around Ontario—is to presuppose what decision they should come up with, what decision they should make, which decision you'd like to see them make. I have my own preferences and certainly

wouldn't think for a minute of inflicting that preference upon those 103 members. I'm looking forward to what they bring forward. I'm looking forward to the debate that follows. I'm looking forward to the referendum and the results, because we're the party—and this whole House, I hope, at the end of the day—that will be the government that brings this choice to the people and allows it to happen.

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any further questions and comments? Seeing none, the member from Niagara Centre has two minutes to respond.

**Mr. Kormos:** The problem is, there aren't going to be any more debates. There won't be any debate around the wording of the referendum question. If the referendum is successful—and the government has engineered a scheme to make it highly unlikely that the referendum is successful—but if it is, there won't be any debate around the wording of the legislation that is presented for first reading. And there won't be any debate about that legislation if the government of the day decides not to call it for second reading. And there will be even less debate after the first proroguing of that House. Think about it. When the government has complied with its obligations pursuant to Bill 155, at the first proroguing of the House, the bill disappears and goes off into that legislative orbit—where by now there is a constellation of bills, both government and private member; galaxies—and is never heard from again. The government of the day has complied, and the issue is gone.

New Democrats are very clear about our support for proportional representation. We think it is a better way, just like so many of the western European countries, amongst others, think it is a better way. The minister says—

**Hon. Mr. Ramsay:** It's not for us to decide.

**Mr. Kormos:** That's exactly the point. That's why you're making the big bucks, Minister. You are making the big bucks to make political decisions, to campaign on ideas, to put ideas out there to the people of Ontario and to be either elected or not elected on the basis of those ideas and to come back here and give effect to the will of the people of Ontario. "That's not what we're to decide"? We decide all sorts of things every day. That's what you are elected to decide.

**The Acting Speaker:** In the absence of the official clock, I must rely upon my own watch, which, being close enough to 6 o' clock, this House stands recessed until 6:45.

*The House adjourned at 1754.*

*Evening meeting reported in volume B.*

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