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Thursday 3 April 2008

Jeudi 3 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Thursday 3 April 2008

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Jeudi 3 avril 2008

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**POVERTY
PAUVRETÉ**

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to move this resolution today, which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario affirm that an effective plan for a strong economy must include setting targets for, and investing in, poverty reduction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Many have experienced or witnessed poverty on some level. I think we could all agree that we need to continue working together to reduce poverty across the province. We need our people at their best, and we therefore have a shared responsibility to help lower poverty levels across the province.

Living below the poverty line is not something that a child has the option of choosing. As residents of this province, we need to protect our children and continue working towards lowering poverty levels. Poor children come from poor families. This simple fact is something we need to be reminded of when building a plan to tackle poverty.

My message today is about creating opportunity, building on what we've already done and continuing to work together. Our government has established a poverty reduction strategy, the first of its kind, with a strict timeline for results. Led by the Honourable Deb Matthews, the cabinet committee on poverty reduction has been diligent in uncovering and bringing to the forefront the issue of poverty today. I respect the hard work that has been done, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations at the end of the year. Great work has been done, but we will do more.

I have talked to many people who are currently living below the poverty line. Specifically, I've had the opportunity to speak to many strong women who find themselves in challenging times. Let me tell you about one such woman. I spoke to her again yesterday to get an up-

date on her situation. This is a strong woman who had to go on Ontario Works to survive. She had everything, and then she had nothing. But here is what has happened. She found a job that she loves and was able to start over. She said to me that she's hopeful and happy that the government has recognized the urgency to deal with poverty. "This is a step in the right direction," she said.

These women need help; their children need help. I'm proud to be a part of a government that is hearing the voices of these individuals. In three out of four of the last provincial budgets, we have seen increased social assistance rates. This government has recognized that help is needed and will continue to build on the progress already made.

As this government has said and has proven, we are committed to investing in people. To assist women in helping them get out of poverty, we must provide them with the necessary tools. Investing in education and providing training programs for women will go a long way towards helping them achieve success. These women and their children deserve every opportunity possible, and we need to continue to provide support to them. Women make up a disproportionate share of the low-income population in Ontario. Women account for more than half of all adults living below the poverty line. We need to provide the right tools to the women in this province who live in poverty, so that they can have every opportunity necessary to succeed.

Since the government has come into power, we have continued to recognize the importance of educating women living in poverty so that they may learn valuable lessons that will help them achieve success. Investing in our greatest asset is about investing in the people of Ontario. We must empower people to realize their full potential. We cannot forget those who need our help most. Poverty creates a lower quality of life. It often creates poor health and poor educational opportunities, poor employment prospects and a feeling of being excluded from society.

Reducing poverty and its effects on children in particular has been a key initiative of our government. Guided by a strong social conscience, we have advanced, and continue to advance, the poverty reduction agenda by implementing a range of initiatives that are designed to address both the consequences and the causes of poverty.

These initiatives will flow from a poverty reduction strategy that will include policies and measures that will have the greatest impact on those living in poverty in Ontario: initiatives such as the investment of \$135 mil-

lion to provide better dental care for low-income families, the investment of \$15 million for capital projects to support Ministry of Children and Youth Services community agencies, the \$100-million investment in social housing, and the \$10-million investment to create a brand new program to help low-income Ontarians build equity and save for an education. These demonstrate this government's commitment towards reducing poverty levels and making a real difference in the lives of Ontarians.

I'm also proud to say that our government has committed over \$350 million for a second-career strategy, which will help unemployed workers obtain the skills they need for new careers, as well as a \$75-million investment to further expand apprenticeship programs across the province.

All of us will benefit when poverty is reduced. Reducing poverty is not only about improving the health and quality of life of those who currently struggle to afford basic necessities; poverty reduction is also about ensuring a strong and prosperous future for our province.

Our poverty reduction strategy will also help those who want to become independent and self-reliant. The best solution to getting out of poverty is often a good job, and the best way to get a good job is to get a solid education. Our government will build upon actions designed to encourage students to stay in school and to help them find ways to further their education and develop skills that will enable them to find good jobs and become self-reliant.

As a past chamber president and a small business owner, I know first-hand that investing in people creates opportunities. By investing in our people, we are creating the strong workforce of today and tomorrow. We must focus on the youth of our province, on our women and other vulnerable groups. For our children, academic success begins with a healthy start to their day, which is why our government has announced that they will be doubling the funding to support the student nutrition program which provides healthy snacks and meals for more than 389,000 children across Ontario.

In my community, we are lucky to have so many community members who have been strong advocates for developing a strong poverty reduction plan. I'd like to take this opportunity to commend their hard work and dedication to this cause. In my riding of Hamilton Mountain, I'd like to commend the strong advocacy and vision of Ms. Denise Arkell of Neighbour to Neighbour and other community members from Hamilton Mountain. We are forming an advisory group to assist the needs that are specific to Hamilton Mountain.

I'd also like to commend the hard work of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, which has been established by strong, resilient individuals such as Mark Chamberlain, Carolyn Milne, Craig Foye and Tom Cooper, to name just a few. These individuals have been instrumental in raising awareness to this critical issue. These are organizations that I believe can be an invaluable partner with our government, where together we can achieve success.

These individuals and their organizations have narrowed in on children as being one of the key areas that needs to be addressed when discussing poverty, and I'm fully committed to helping them achieve their goal.

1010

The message appears to be the same wherever poverty is discussed: In order to achieve results, we need to invest in our children and provide them with the tools to be successful. We have made great strides, but must all work together. We all need our partners to step up to the plate and commit to lowering our levels of poverty in this province.

Without a doubt, addressing poverty is necessary to improve our economy and to promote an inclusive society. All women and men must be able to participate fully in the social and economic benefits of Ontario. I am committed to working together with my colleagues and advocacy groups across the province to achieve our goal on such an important matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: This is an interesting resolution. It's kind of like a resolution that might read, "that this assembly affirm that in order for one to have a lovely Saturday afternoon picnic, one must have blue skies"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member from Thornhill, you are not allowed to read from electronic devices.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's the same as a resolution that would say that to have a nice picnic you must have blue skies and white fluffy clouds on a sunny day. It's interesting that a member of the governing party would stand up in this chamber and speak about poverty and the state of the economy when the policies of this government are responsible for the very conditions she now wants to address.

The member wishes to talk about the need for investment in poverty reduction measures and the need for targets. I'm in favour of taking real and meaningful steps to reduce the scourge of poverty, and I'm in favour of establishing realistic targets for poverty reduction. However, I find this supposed concern on the government benches hollow when there is so much that could have been done to help combat poverty in last week's budget, but they chose not to do so.

Let's talk about \$390 in overtaxation owed by this government to every single man, woman and child, instead of Santa Claus-type infrastructure allocations welcomed by municipalities but representing no positive ongoing funding source. Let's talk about 194,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Ontario under this government's watch. We have an unemployment rate that is above the national average for the first time in 30 years, and we have business tax structures that are the least competitive in the entire country.

I could go on, but somehow the word “disingenuous” keeps popping into my mind. This resolution is another example of the McGuinty government talking the talk but not walking the walk. They feign concern about poverty, yet the fact is, their policies created an atmosphere in which poverty thrives.

If the McGuinty government was serious about poverty reduction, they would immediately reorganize our business tax structures and reduce tax rates to put us on a level footing with other jurisdictions in the country, and they would not be overtaxing every man, woman and child in Ontario by \$390; \$390 may not sound like much to the members of the government, but for those Ontarians living cheque to cheque, that \$390 may be the difference between having a roof over their heads or not, or perhaps it means a little extra food on the table for a family struggling to make ends meet.

There are families across this province who risk being driven into poverty by the systemic discrimination perpetuated by this government. I'm talking about the families of autistic children I heard at a round table that I convened in my own constituency this past week. Parents go broke spending money on IBI and other therapies. Parents are being forced to give up jobs to take care of autistic children, due to inadequate programming in Ontario schools. Like all parents, those of autistic children are just trying to give their kids the best possible start in life, yet the government repeatedly throws obstacles in their way and repeatedly hits them in the pocketbook. Perhaps the money spent taking these parents to court could be better used developing sound economic policies.

The population of the GTA and the greater Golden Horseshoe is due to dramatically increase over the next 25 years, and that growth is being driven by immigration. Census statistics released yesterday show an increase in the number of visible minority immigrants by 27% between 2001 and 2006. Driven by this immigration, the visible minority population of Canada now exceeds five million.

These immigrants come to Canada searching for a better life for their family. They are hard-working. They are driven. They share the same values as we do in the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario: individual dignity, hard work, achievement and a strong safety net in case there are unexpected hard times. The changing demographics of Ontario present unique challenges in addressing poverty that must be dealt with in a timely fashion.

A few weeks ago, I met with members of the Colour of Poverty campaign. This campaign, spearheaded by various cultural organizations from across the province, is aimed at raising awareness of the racialization of poverty, and I want to share some of their statistics with you.

The number of immigrants in Toronto who are poor has grown by 125%. Many live in unsafe and inadequate housing conditions. Ethnoracial minority group members, or people of colour, make up over 13% of Canada's population; by the year 2017, it will rise to 20%. By the year

2017, more than half of Toronto's population will be people of colour.

Nearly one in five immigrants experiences a state of chronic low income, which is more than twice the rate for Canadian-born individuals. Ethnoracial minority or non-European origin families make up 37% of all families in Toronto but account for 59% of poor families. Between 1980 and 2000, while the poverty rate for the non-racialized European heritage population fell by 28%, poverty among racialized families rose by 361%; and 32% of children in racialized families and 47% of children in recent immigrant families in Ontario live in poverty.

As our population ages, we will increasingly rely upon immigration to sustain our economy and our workforce. We cannot afford to allow this sizable proportion of our population to fall behind.

This brings me to my next point. This province, and indeed this country, is the envy of the world today because of the determination and sacrifice of our seniors. However, many of our proud seniors are facing a great indignity at the hands of the McGuinty government: the loss of their homes due to increasingly unaffordable property tax rates. We have seen it far too often: seniors forced to sell the home they raised their children in because they can no longer afford to pay property tax. For many seniors in this province, there is precious little to keep them from joining the ranks of the poverty-stricken.

Municipalities are not to blame. The Municipal Act restricts the income streams available to municipalities. Cities and towns are forced to put the cost for infrastructure capital and social services on the backs of ratepayers. When cash does flow from the province for much-needed municipal projects, it is in the form of restrictive and unfair one-off programs that are often lottery based.

As I said during my inaugural speech, if we in this Legislature cannot say the policies of the government are helping people, then it means those policies need to be reworked. This resolution does nothing more than pay lip service to the reality in which too many Ontarians find themselves every day. The people of Ontario cannot put food on their tables with the hollow words of the McGuinty Liberals and the member opposite. The budget does not address this, but throws gasoline on the fire. They need real solutions, and the need becomes increasingly acute day by day.

The opposition has been warning the government that action needs to be taken to save the economy and jobs. Economists have been repeatedly stating that Ontario is on track to become a have-not province. Sadly, this government does not listen, and it is the hard-working people of Ontario who pay the price. Much like Emperor Nero during the days of the Roman Empire, Premier McGuinty is content to do nothing, and Ontario burns.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First of all, I want to say thank you to the member from Hamilton Mountain. It's not her fault that she has to stand and defend the indefensible on behalf of the McGuinty government—and it is indefensible.

This is resolution, as we all know—I think we know it's silly. This is a government that just heard from Campaign 2000 yesterday some very startling statistics and some very disturbing ones. First of all, there's not only a situation from 2005 but a situation growing out of the situation that this government found themselves in, in 2005, of increasing poverty. We now have, according to them, one in eight, sometimes one in five—depending how you read the LICO, the low-income cut-off statistics—children living in poverty in this province. This is a disaster. This is something that we should be ashamed about and moving on very quickly.

What does it mean to move on something? What it means to move on something is not to stand up and read a resolution, it's not to strike a cabinet committee; it's actually to do something. If they really were concerned about poverty in this province, what would they do? You know, nothing needs to be studied. We have lots and lots of studies to show us what needs to be done. Here's what all the anti-poverty activists are calling for. They're calling for it with one voice.

First of all, they're calling for an increase in the minimum wage to the poverty line. Is that so difficult to do? It would cost the taxpayers nothing. Raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 now, up to \$11 in 2011, and then index it to the consumer price index. That's what they need to do.

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What else do they need to do? They immediately need to end the clawback of the national child supplement. They have not done that. Instead, they've put in place a slightly less onerous clawback. That's all they've done. They need to do that.

They need to build housing. Again, with one voice, every anti-poverty activist has called for this government to build housing. Are they building housing? No, not one penny, not one penny in the new budget for new affordable housing units. In fact, the only money that appears is \$100 million for the repair of existing units—only a third as much, I should point out, as the city of Toronto needs for repair of existing housing units. There's not one penny for new housing units.

What else would they do? They'd certainly help out small business. I couldn't agree more. Are they? No, they're not. What we've asked for is a phase-out reform of the business education tax on small Toronto and municipal businesses that are unfairly taxed. Are they doing that? No. Well, again, crumbs. With this government, it's always pie tomorrow, never pie today; crumbs today. So what do we get? We get crumbs today and a promise that in 2014 that something will change.

We need a Buy Ontario strategy. This is this what our party has put forward. We need more jobs in this province. We need action on the job front. We don't see that. We see retraining of one in 10 workers. What are we retraining them for? Jobs in Alberta; jobs in Manitoba. That's where they're going, and that's where they will go, because this government is not doing anything right here and right at home.

We know, we know, it's incontestable: Hugh Mackenzie of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has said, and shown the statistics to prove it, that the poor in this province are now worse off than they were under Harris-Eves: in real dollars, worse off. That means those on ODSP, OW, minimum wage—the poor. Again, what does this government do? Nothing. They spin. They have a call-in number; they have a website; they have a photo op. But do they act? Absolutely not.

Inaction is egregious ethically as to make the matter worse. So now they are in this indefensible—and again, apologies to the poor member for Hamilton Mountain, who had to stand up and defend the indefensible—position of making the poor poorer in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to stand up in my place and take the opportunity to congratulate the member for Hamilton Mountain for bringing such an important resolution to this House. To the members opposite and to the people of Ontario, what we did during our last mandate, and what we're planning to do in the future in this mandate—as she outlined, the vision of this government is to reduce the poverty level in the province of Ontario. As you know, it doesn't take a great thinker to think we have a problem in the province of Ontario. We have a poverty issue in Ontario. There's no doubt about it. We're not going to say, "No, we don't," and just live in a fantasy dream. No. It's a reality, yes, that we do have a problem.

That's why we addressed this issue during our last mandate. Almost the majority of the last budget, in 2007, was catered toward social issues and poverty issues, to address the working poor, to invest more money in this element of our society. Also, due to this strategy, in this mandate our Premier appointed the Honourable Deb Matthews to lead a cabinet committee to do studies and take initiatives in order to reduce poverty in Ontario, and she is doing so.

The member for Hamilton Mountain is a great activist in this group. She's also a member of the women's caucus, who meet on a regular basis to address this issue. As you know, the women in this province play a pivotal role in eliminating poverty in this beautiful province.

Since we got elected in 2003, we put a lot of steps forward in order to increase the minimum wage, to support the working poor in this province. The member from the Conservative Party was speaking. Do you know what they did? They put a freeze on it. They didn't do anything. And guess what? Since we got elected in 2003, we've increased Ontario Works and ODSP levels by almost 9%. Guess what the Conservatives did? They reduced it by 25%. This government cares about poor people. As you know, the poor come from different elements; some are as a result of mental illness, some as a result of being newcomers to this province who don't know how to integrate, and some are seniors among us. That's why this government pays attention to all of those elements. For example, we increased Ontario Works, as I mentioned, by 9%. In this budget, there is \$250 for every

senior who makes less than \$50,000, and a couple who make less than \$60,000 are eligible to earn a certain amount of money and some kind of tax rebate if they want to remain in their homes. As a member of this government, I'm proud of our initiatives.

Due to the constraint and the economical change in North America, due to the economical shift in this province, we had to restrain our budget; we couldn't do more than we are supposed to do if we had a \$200-billion budget. But considering what we have, considering all the elements we are facing in the province of Ontario, we invested a great deal in our social issues like our dental program in order to support the poor among us. We invested more money in social housing: almost \$100 million to fix a lot of social housing in the province.

The NDP member was saying that we didn't invest any money in supporting housing, but I want to tell her to go back to her record and our government's record and see how many millions of dollars we invested in many different communities across the province to support housing, to house the poor people among us. We believe strongly on this side of the House that our responsibility as a government is to support the most vulnerable people among us. It is our responsibility to support them, because we believe strongly that we cannot do it alone. All of us have to work together in order to create a productive society.

We have a lot of people among us below the poverty line, not because they want to be poor, but because of certain circumstances they couldn't make it. It's our responsibility as a government and as a society to give them the support, the lift and the ability to walk with us in order to utilize the ability to support themselves, support their families and also contribute to this beautiful economy and society. Only in this fashion and in this way can all of us prosper in Ontario.

The member for Hamilton Mountain brought to this House an important issue that all of us are concerned about. Every one of us deals with it from a different point of view. The member opposite from the Conservatives—they didn't care about poverty issues when they were in power; they slashed Ontario Works, ODSP, and they never built affordable homes or supported any social housing.

Mr. Michael Prue: You never built any either.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We did a lot to support housing. Our record shows clearly how many millions we spent investing in social housing to support the people who have no ability to rent, because we think it's our obligation to give them the support and a lift.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak. I want to congratulate the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing this important issue to us.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to speak today on this important resolution. I can't believe there's anyone in this House who would disagree with the statement that your government should have an effective plan for a strong economy and your government should invest in poverty reduction. I also believe, however, that the un-

fortunate part of today's debate is that in the second term of the Liberal government, we're still talking about the importance of having an effective plan instead of discussing the plan. Where's the vision? Where's the plan? The McGuinty Liberals are in their fifth year and we still hear about the need for further study, further review.

I believe that Ontarians are looking for leadership in how the McGuinty Liberals are going to deal with poverty while our economy is slowing, because we all know that poverty will not be reduced if Ontario's economy is facing a downturn. Some economists are using the word "recession." After four years of high revenue, where does that leave us for the next four years?

As the community and social services critic for the Progressive Conservative caucus, I have been watching and reading with more than a passing interest as the social assistance rolls are increasing across Ontario. In Essex county, social assistance caseloads increased 9% in 2007 and are expected to increase by another 6% in 2008. Now, when I see caseloads increase like that, my first thought is, where are the jobs?

1030

In Windsor, I think we know where the jobs are. Windsor's economy is shrinking because Ontario's manufacturing sector is shrinking because of this government's lack of vision. And now, we have the tragic outcome of Mayor Eddie Francis holding open houses to find ways to assist Windsor residents who are commuting to western Canada. Imagine; I've heard of this long-distance commute before, but never for Ontario. Bless Windsor for their ingenuity, and I wish the workers well, but this is not a long-term plan to keep Ontario strong.

When you start losing large portions of your population as they leave our province for jobs elsewhere, you start losing tax assessment dollars. And don't forget your social services costs continue to rise, because not everyone has the resources or training to find a job elsewhere, and you have fewer and fewer people paying to look after our most vulnerable. The model is not sustainable.

I'd like to highlight some of the points made in a recent paper from the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. For those of you unfamiliar with the work of the institute, they are an independent, not-for-profit organization established in 2001 to serve as a research arm for the Ontario Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress. Their goal is to continue to increase our standard of living in Ontario. The institute and the task force are supported through the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, so I'm sure the members on the Liberal benches can receive a copy to peruse. I would recommend it. Some excellent thought has been put into this paper.

The institute states, "Canada has one of the most prosperous and competitive economies in the world," but—there's always a "but"—"we are not living up to our full economic potential that would increase well being for ourselves and future generations." The institute confirms that Canada's economy is one of the most successful, but

against the United States, who happen to be our largest trading partner, we continue to fall further behind.

So how do we shrink that gap? The institute has proposed a number of initiatives, but for the purposes of our discussion here today, I will focus on one of their priorities: Build a smarter tax system to raise motivation for business to invest. “Currently, Canada has among the highest tax rates on business investment in the world. The federal government is taking dramatic action to give Canada an environment more conducive to business investment,” and Ontario needs to follow Ottawa’s lead. That is a direct quote out of the institute’s paper.

Finally, the institute has highlighted four areas they would like to see the Ontario government focus on:

(1) Attitudes: Accept the challenge; overcome complacency.

(2) Investment: Focus on people and technology.

(3) Motivations: Pursue smarter taxation; remove capital tax immediately; reduce corporate income tax rates.

(4) Structures: Place a premium on creativity and innovation.

Sounds good, and where have we been hearing this before? From no less than the members of the Progressive Conservative party, of course. My colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook has spoken often of the need to have a strong economy so that we can ensure our government has the resources needed to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

All of which brings us back to the member from Hamilton Mountain’s resolution: that government should have “an effective plan for a strong economy,” and our government should invest in “poverty reduction.” One of the best ways to have a strong economy and have the ability to invest in poverty reduction, instead of just talking about it, is to remove the barriers so that everyone who can work has a job to go to. Then, collect a reasonable amount of tax to ensure that you can look after vulnerable citizens who cannot work.

I would hope that we stop talking about the need for a plan, and have this government bring forward their vision so that we can debate something concrete.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I also would like to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for trying her best this morning with this resolution. But as my colleague has mentioned, it is hard to spin when you have nothing to work from.

When the McGuinty government got elected, they were an activist government. They were going to put poverty at the top of their agenda. In 2003, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberals promised to end the clawback on the national child benefit supplement. We all know that that promise was broken, but that didn’t stop them from making it again in the 2007 election. We are now in April 2008, and the clawback is still happening.

Just as shameful: Families and individuals receiving social assistance, either through the Ontario disability support program, better known as ODSP, or Ontario Works, OW, are actually receiving less in provincial ben-

efits when inflation is taken into account than when the government of Dalton McGuinty took power in 2003. It has gone down, not up. Ontario’s poorest citizens fell behind during the Mike Harris years, but when the McGuinty government was elected they continued to fall behind. Nothing changed for them.

En 2000, les libéraux de Dalton McGuinty avaient promis de cesser de reprendre la prime nationale pour enfants du gouvernement fédéral. Ils ont eu quatre ans. Tout le monde sait qu’ils n’ont pas gardé cette promesse. Ils ont refait cette promesse-là en 2007, mais nous sommes maintenant en avril 2008 et la pratique continue. Le gouvernement fédéral donne 100 \$ par mois aux familles qui ont des enfants pour les aider, mais pour les familles les plus pauvres, celles qui en ont le plus besoin, le gouvernement provincial reprend ces dollars.

Pour ceux qui vivent soit avec une incapacité, une invalidité ou un handicap, qui ne peuvent pas survenir à leurs besoins et qui ont besoin du programme d’appui aux personnes invalides ou du programme Ontario au travail, ces gens sont forcés de vivre sous le seuil de la pauvreté. Ils ont eu de petites augmentations pendant que le gouvernement libéral était au pouvoir, mais si on tient compte de l’index des coûts de la vie, ils reçoivent moins en ce moment qu’ils recevaient en 2003 lorsque le gouvernement a été élu.

Pendant les huit ans que le gouvernement de Mike Harris a été au pouvoir, les pauvres en ont arraché dur—cela a été huit ans sans aucune augmentation. Avec le gouvernement McGuinty, ils avaient un peu d’espoir, mais on se rend compte, cinq ans plus tard—ça fait cinq ans que les libéraux sont au pouvoir, et les gens qui reçoivent Ontario au travail et les gens qui reçoivent des primes d’invalidité sont plus pauvres maintenant qu’ils n’étaient en 2003.

Meanwhile, Ontario’s working poor are also falling further and further behind. In Dalton McGuinty’s Ontario, 1.2 million working men and women earn less than \$10 an hour. Those 1.2 million Ontarians are predominantly women, young people and new Canadians. In fact, people working 40 hours a week at \$8.75 an hour are still \$4,000 below the poverty line. The NDP believes that aggressive measures should have been taken in the provincial budget to bring the level of poverty down, but it didn’t happen.

Pour 1,2 million de travailleurs, ce sont les Ontariens et les Ontariennes qui gagnent moins de 10 \$ de l’heure, et on ne se fait pas d’illusion : de ces 1,2 million de personnes-là, la plupart d’entre elles sont des femmes, des personnes jeunes et des nouveaux arrivants. Pour ceux qui travaillent 40 heures par semaine—on parle d’un job à temps plein à 8,75 \$ de l’heure ; c’est le salaire minimum en ce moment—ces gens-là sont encore 4 000 \$ sous le seuil de la pauvreté. Ça veut dire que tu ne peux pas payer ton loyer, l’épicerie, un petit peu de linge et le transport pour te rendre au travail. Il n’y en a pas suffisamment.

The province announced that they were doubling the meals for children at school and community centres

through the student nutrition program. That sounded like good news to me. I was excited about that. Unfortunately, the program is so meagre that even when you double it, all it means is an extra \$50 a year for each of the 400,000 students who need that program and are expected to benefit. If you do the math, that means a whole dollar a week. It used to be 50 cents. They've added another 50 cents. It's now a dollar.

1040

Le programme de nutrition va doubler. Au début, ça semble comme une bonne nouvelle : on va doubler le budget. On va y investir des millions de dollars de plus. Donc, au début j'étais assez contente. J'ai dit, « Bon, bien. Voilà finalement quelque chose de bien. » Mais quand on commence à faire un petit peu de maths en arrière de ça, tu te rends compte que ça veut dire 50 \$ par enfant, parce qu'il y a environ 400 000 enfants qui vivent dans la pauvreté en Ontario. Ça veut dire un dollar de plus—un dollar par semaine. Ils recevaient 50 sous; ils reçoivent 50 sous de plus—un dollar par semaine.

Est-ce qu'il n'y a pas un libéral qui est allé faire l'épicerie depuis 20 ans ? Un dollar par semaine ne t'achète pas beaucoup de nourriture. Ces enfants-là vont continuer d'avoir faim, vont continuer d'avoir de la misère à bien performer à l'école.

The NDP moved a number of motions outlining an ambitious anti-poverty program. We talked about the elimination of the national child benefit clawback and immediately implementing the full Ontario child benefit, which would provide equal benefit to all low-income families, regardless of resources. We talked about publicly funded child care. We talked about Ontario Smiles, which would provide dental care to the poorest. We talked about increasing minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour, and to \$11.25 by 2011. We talked about increasing ODSP and annexing it to the cost of living. But none of this happened. Le gouvernement n'a pas écouté les recommandations des néo-démocrates.

On voulait arrêter d'enlever la prime nationale aux enfants les plus pauvres. Ils ne nous ont pas écoutés.

On voulait que le supplément de l'Ontario soit appliqué à son plein potentiel tout de suite. Mais non ; on devra attendre un autre quatre ans.

On voulait également un système de garderies publiques qui permet à toutes les familles qui ont besoin d'un système de garderies d'y avoir accès à un prix modique, un peu sous le régime qui est au Québec en ce moment à 7 \$ par jour.

On avait un plan ambitieux pour s'assurer que nos dents étaient inclus dans le système de la santé. C'est à dire que s'il y a une personne qui ne peut pas aller chez le dentiste, on aurait un programme pour l'aider.

On voudrait également augmenter le salaire minimum à 10,25 \$ maintenant, l'indexer au coût de la vie, et le monter à 11,25 \$ par 2011. Rien de ça n'a été retenu.

When the McGuinty government promised poverty was going to be at the top of the agenda, we thought we would see leadership. What we saw was a big letdown of the poorest in Ontario.

Quand les libéraux de McGuinty nous ont dit qu'ils seraient sérieux face à la pauvreté et qu'elle serait au-dessus de l'ordre du jour, ça nous a donné bon espoir. Mais ce qu'on a vu, ce n'est pas du leadership pour les personnes les plus pauvres. Cela a été un abandon total. Ceci n'est pas acceptable.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am very pleased to rise today and speak in support of this resolution put forth by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

My own riding of York South–Weston has some things in common with Hamilton Mountain. Both of these ridings have historically been places of arrival for many newcomers to our province. These hard-working people contributed to Ontario's growth over the decades, often by working in the manufacturing sector. Today, due to the changing dynamics of global markets and the emergence of new technology, my riding of York South–Weston has been affected by the migration of manufacturing jobs to the greater Toronto area and even beyond. For example, the Kodak plant, which opened in 1913, actually closed in 2005.

The residents of Hamilton Mountain and York South–Weston want to provide for themselves and their families. They have a strong work ethic and are ready to roll up their sleeves. But many are in need of help. Many residents continue to lag behind the economic growth and prosperity that are enjoyed by so many other Ontario communities. We know that the small business sector in particular is in need of revitalization. Many in our workforce must have innovative retraining opportunities if they are to continue to be productive and self-sustaining citizens in the future.

One of the key pillars of our government's budget approved just yesterday is retraining. We intend to give people who are eager to work the tools necessary to acquire the skills so that they may contribute by participating in the growing field of today's economy.

An effective plan for a strong economy must include investing in poverty reduction. That is why we are moving in the right direction by working on a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. We need a long-term vision. The area of Weston–Mount Dennis in the riding of York South–Weston is one of the 13 priority neighbourhoods identified by the city of Toronto and the United Way. This is one of the areas which can greatly benefit and be positively affected by a poverty reduction strategy. My riding is also home to many single-parent families who would benefit from such a strategy.

Our government is making a commitment to improving the quality of life of Ontarians. I would like to mention just some of the initiatives that we are taking. We are providing benefits for low-income earners. We are doubling the funding for nutrition programs in the schools so that our children may learn more effectively, and when I visited some of the schools in my riding, the news was most welcome. We are investing in English as a second language, benefiting newcomers. We are building on the Ontario child benefit, providing almost 1.3 million children and their families much-needed support. We're in-

vesting in affordable supportive housing and repairs to affordable housing, and increasing the minimum wage and social assistance rates. And there is more to do.

Our government strives to have a balanced approach. History teaches us that an inclusive and compassionate society—a society that reaches out and helps people when they are most in need—is a society that works and can grow. Leading thinkers like Richard Florida remind us that the most important aspect in the new economy is the creative capital inherent in each person. Our government's goal is to help each person realize their potential, give families a chance to get ahead and give people who need it access to programs so that they may overcome temporary economic challenges and not get caught up in the vicious poverty cycle.

The residents in ridings such as Hamilton Mountain and York South–Weston are particularly vulnerable in these changing economic times. Therefore, I support the resolution put forth by the member from Hamilton Mountain. This is an important issue. I think it's important that everyone has a chance at success, regardless of temporary shifting economic paradigms.

Mr. Michael Prue: I only have a minute and a half, so I would like to quote one of my favourite authors on Liberals and what they try to spin. It's 75 years old. It's a guy by the name of Goerwell, and he writes as follows: "Anyone who relishes empty phrases, who believes in catchwords, ornamental preambles and in the supreme power of humbuggery, will always find persons available to give an hour's bombastic talk on any subject between the remotest star and the centre of the earth." I think what we have here today is a very good example of what Goerwell said in 1931.

I grew up in a place called Regent Park, and people know what that place is like today, as it was when I was a boy. There was poverty everywhere and people talked about doing something about it. In fact, it was talk and talk and more talk, and in the end very little was done.

I read this today, the well-meaning phrase, I'm sure, from the member from Hamilton Mountain: to invest in poverty reduction. With the greatest of respect, the government had an option to do that in the budget and failed. They gave 2% for those poor people on ODSP, and then when the questions were asked, it's only in the last quarter of the year. They have to wait nine months to even see the 2%. They said they were giving some money to people on ODSP, but in fact there is absolutely nothing at this point.

1050

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I rise today to support the resolution brought forward by my colleague the member from Hamilton Mountain, to support the McGuinty government's commitment to poverty reduction and to reiterate that an effective plan for a strong economy must include setting targets for and investing in poverty reduction.

The McGuinty government is committed to improving the quality of life of all Ontarians. This includes families and vulnerable citizens. This government is taking action

under the government's poverty reduction strategy: dental care for low-income families; a student nutrition program—when I'm talking to my communities in Kitchener–Conestoga, \$32 million is not meagre; a 2% increase to benefits under Ontario Works and the Ontario disability support program, increasing the comfort allowance for residents of long-term-care homes in 2008-09; a new property tax grant over five years for low- and moderate-income seniors, homeowners.

The McGuinty government is committed to its people. Ontario's advantage is its people. We've made a commitment to children and youth to give them the best possible elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. We are giving workers of all ages ongoing opportunities to upgrade their skills and pursue lifelong learning. We're giving workers facing change the support and long-term retraining they need, not just to find new jobs but to find better jobs. We're giving newcomers to Ontario the information, access, training and language skills they need to reach their full potential. We're giving the unemployed and underemployed the literacy skills, the academic upgrading, the training and the support they need to enter the workforce.

The McGuinty government is committed to new measures to tackle poverty and to build opportunity. Ontario's plan for a strong economy includes supporting low-income families so that everyone can have the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century. Premier McGuinty outlined this when he stated, "Ontario is only at its best when all of us are working, building and dreaming together. Supporting each other is not only the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do and part of our plan for a stronger economy."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Aggelonitis, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'd like to thank the members from Thornhill, Parkdale–High Park, London–Fanshawe, Dufferin–Caledon, Nickel Belt, York South–Weston, Beaches–East York and Kitchener–Conestoga for their very insightful comments this morning.

Poverty is in all of our communities, and I firmly believe that we need to continue working together to achieve our goals. I am committed to helping the cause of poverty reduction across this province, and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the House and the community members to achieve further success. This is an important issue for all of us. It is something we have made great strides in, but there is more to do, and we will do more.

WATER QUALITY

QUALITÉ DE L'EAU

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Green Ribbon beach program, an important environmental initiative proposed by the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, be supported.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mrs. Mitchell, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I rise this morning to speak on a matter of significant importance, not just to my constituents in Huron–Bruce, but to all of those in the province who are concerned about water quality and the condition of our Ontario beaches.

Members of this Legislature are very concerned about the state of the province's drinking water and the role that the Great Lakes play in that equation.

As you know, the entire western coast of my riding runs along Lake Huron, from Grand Bend to Southampton, making the issue of beach standards an important matter for my constituents. The quality and safety of the beaches in my riding also goes a long way toward supporting the local tourism industry in many of the coastal communities, and it certainly has a direct impact on our local economy.

The green ribbon beach program is proposed as a framework to recognize excellence in environmental stewardship for beaches located in rural communities. This program has been based on the very successful but more urban-focused Blue Flag program. The Blue Flag program is an internationally recognized beach water quality program that is sponsored and administered by Environmental Defence here in Canada.

Before speaking to the green ribbon program, I just want to discuss some of the key considerations of the Blue Flag program and several of the requirements that have made it successful in many of the urban regions of this province. This will also help to illustrate how the green ribbon program would be successful in a similar manner but with a differentiation in the requirements that will make for a stronger focus on the province's rural beaches.

As I stated before, the eligibility requirements for the Blue Flag program have a decidedly more urban focus when it comes to beach protection. To offer credence to the green ribbon program, I just want to use a few examples.

With the Blue Flag program, there's a necessity for lifeguards. When we think about the rural areas, being able to provide the life-saving equipment and the lifeguards at a given beach area becomes very problematic. The presence of lifeguards at a Blue Flag beach is recommended in order to increase the beach's safety level, especially in beaches with a higher number of beachgoers. For rural areas, this specification simply would not be possible.

The beachfront along Lake Huron in my riding extends far past the urban boundaries of the towns, and the cost in both dollars and human resources to have lifeguards and safety equipment at all beach locations is simply not achievable.

Another of the requirements for the Blue Flag certification is that the beach in question must be constantly patrolled by authorized and adequate security personnel. While this is a very necessary element for safety at urban

beaches, as my previous point indicated, it's untenable in smaller rural communities, from both a fiscal and human resource perspective.

Another condition of the Blue Flag program is the requirement that a supply of potable drinking water must be available at the beach at all times. It's specified that this source of water can be by way of fountain, pipe or faucet, but that it must be protected from contamination by animals. While this, again, is a very noble and often necessary requirement for a public beach in a populated area, I would again argue that it would become a near impossibility for those requirements to be followed on many of the vast beachfronts along Lake Huron.

Despite my previous statements—I want to be very, very clear on this—I am by no means not lending very, very strong support to the Blue Flag program. I feel that it is a very worthwhile program and one that adds a great deal of value to the communities across the province that have achieved certification.

For just one moment, I want to talk about who has achieved certification within my riding. The municipality of Kincardine has received accreditation as a Blue Flag beach. Another beach in the town of Goderich is currently a candidate for certification.

However, as I alluded to earlier, the Blue Flag designation is simply not attainable for many of the smaller rural areas that have beaches along Lake Huron. That is why the green ribbon award is of great benefit to the small communities where environmental sustainability of their beaches is certainly needed.

This brings me back to the green ribbon program. This award, which proposes to recognize those beaches which are prized for their high quality, where care is taken to preserve their natural, unspoiled environment, offers many similar benefits to the Blue Flag designation, but its centre focuses on helping small rural beaches reach the certification. The green ribbon program proposes a central, integral role in the protection of beaches for those people who live near the beach. The program is unique and it emphasizes local stewardship by volunteers.

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Eligibility for the green ribbon program award involves five key requirements. The first requirement is that the eligible beach must be managed carefully and in consultation with the local conservation organizations as part of a stewardship plan that respects the environmentally sensitive nature of the beach.

Secondly, the program distinguishes eligible beaches as those areas that have received active community contribution in implementing numerous beach stewardship practices.

A third requirement the green ribbon program indicates is that eligible beaches must be relatively free from structures and erosion protection that serve to harden the coast and restrict natural process.

The final two requirements for attaining the green ribbon program award for an area beach are that the designated beach areas must promote public accessibility

and that the participating beach organization must actively engage local residents in coastal environmental education on ways to help maintain and sustain the beach-front.

The green ribbon beach program award has also set out 15 desired objectives that this program can achieve, if implemented. Due to constraints on time today, I cannot go into specific details, but I would encourage you to go to the website for the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation.

I'd like to recognize the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, which is the organization that has taken the time and the effort to propose the green ribbon beach program award. The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, has set forward the goals of protecting and restoring the coastal environment of Lake Huron and further promoting a healthy ecosystem along the coast. The coastal centre, which is a registered, not-for-profit charitable organization, has benefited from the work of thousands of community volunteers dedicated to the conservation of Lake Huron's natural shoreline environment. It functions as the local coastal management resource team for lakeshore communities, partnering conservation authorities, government agencies and the public.

The centre has also been the sponsor for an annual public seminar in the community, including last year's *It All Ends Up in the Lake* conference, which was also very well attended. This year, the centre will host a conference entitled *Is the Coast Clear?* on May 23. This will commemorate the 10th anniversary of this conference within Huron-Bruce.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You should attend that one.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I will be there, as I have been at all the other conferences. It is certainly a very worthwhile day.

I believe that programs such as the proposed green ribbon award are setting their objectives towards helping to maintain and protect our Great Lakes. This is one of the central reasons why I'm here today supporting this very important program, and I'm asking for your support as well.

The protection of our Great Lakes through such programs is yet another way in which we—all of us today, as legislative members—can help this very worthy cause: to recognize the thousands of volunteers that have dedicated good portions of their lives, their children's lives and their grandchildren's lives to ensure that we have a water system that will meet the needs of all Ontarians into the future. It's something that is a constant work-in-progress.

Whatever we can do to raise the awareness of what we can do as individuals, what we can do as groups and what we can do as legislative members—let's all support it today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Good morning. I have to say that when I was seeking election and looking forward to coming to Queen's Park, I thought we would be debating the great subjects and topics of interest and concern for Ontario: the high unemployment, the half a million people without family doctors, the need for mental health assistance and care and so many important subjects. I'm beginning to believe that the more ridiculous the subject, the more importance we place on it down here.

I was reading through this green ribbon program the other night and it sounds very good. We're here for debate right at the moment, but of course, in order to have debate there must be a subject of substance, not just fluff. This sounds good, it sounds fluffy, it sounds like motherhood and apple pie, but really, it's somewhat disturbing.

First off, when you look up in the dictionary the words "coastal" or "coast," you'll see that it is a saltwater shoreline. I've been living in Ontario all my life. I have never found a saltwater body here in Ontario. Maybe there is—

Mr. Michael Prue: Hudson Bay.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, you're right. I don't think the honourable member was thinking of the beaches of Hudson Bay when this was done, though.

Anyway, we have to really look at this. Cleaning up a beach, cleaning up your property—public property, private property—is a good and honourable thing to do. I know in my own neighbourhood—I live on a road that's called the dump road in Lanark county. From time to time, litter and debris get thrown on the road; it falls out of trucks, whatever. We don't have a committee and we don't get a green ribbon, but everybody in the community goes out and picks up the garbage as it falls off the trucks. That really is what people in rural Ontario and in all of Ontario are all about. People don't need to be legislated or get a little green ribbon on their forehead for picking up some garbage.

I think the important things here that we have to talk about in this House are getting lost in the fluff. Here is a binder, and on every page in it is a young man or woman from Ontario who has been denied an apprenticeship job because of the government's restrictive policies on apprenticeship ratios.

I have another note here. In my area alone, 235 people with intellectual disabilities cannot find a home; 273 people are on wait-lists for program services such as respite care, therapy, clinical assessment, and the list goes on and on. And what does this government come up with? Fluff. Where is the substantive debate? Where is the honest and forthright discussion about the real concerns and subjects of interest and importance to the people of rural Ontario?

Let me read something out of this green ribbon program. "Litter removing is accomplished without mechanical equipment, thereby leaving all naturally occurring debris, such as driftwood and other strandline debris, to interact with the natural beach process, unless it becomes contaminated with a substance that is hazardous to public health."

That's a long-winded way to say pick up the Tim Hortons cup if you see it on the beach. Really, do we need to direct people to do that? Do we need to give them a little green star or ribbon on their forehead if they did pick it up? I know the people in my community, and I think the people in the honourable member's community as well, are thoughtful, respectful people who don't need Big Brother giving them a little push and a little pat on the back to pick up some flotsam or jetsam that has landed on our coastal environment.

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I could go on and on, but the people of Huron–Bruce, just like the people of Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, expect a higher calibre of debate and discussion. They expect the people in this House to stand up and represent them, to fix the economy where it has been broken, to get family doctors where there are none available. They expect more from us than just fluff.

We need to deliver more to the people of rural Ontario. We need to deliver more to all people in Ontario. Let us raise our awareness, let us raise the calibre of our discussion, and let us do what is right for everybody in Ontario and fix the real problems.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a pleasure to be here today to speak to this issue. How can one say one cannot support any environmental initiative, no matter how small, that is going to help our communities, help have better beaches, help people to swim and have safer surroundings?

The green ribbon initiative, as the mover has stated, is part and parcel of the larger Blue Flag initiative. If I can speak about how effective that has been, to add some credibility to her motion, the Blue Flag initiative, which has been adopted in and around the city of Toronto, has proved to be an amazing vehicle to bring people into our city and to have Torontonians recognize the clarity of the water, the safety of the beaches and that it is a good and safe place to take one's family on a hot summer day. In fact, most of the beaches that have been recognized and have blue flags flying above them are in my riding of Beaches–East York. The safest beach of all, I understand, is Clarke Beach which is in the adjacent riding of Toronto–Danforth, but Woodbine Beaches is a very close second.

We go each year at the start of the Blue Flag season to raise the blue flag to ensure that the beach is in pristine condition, that the workers have been out there picking up the bottles, cans and winter detritus that are strewn around. It looks very nice, and when you go into the water, although it is a little chilly when we go in there toward the end of June, it is clear and safe. At the beach, we'll have something I think the green ribbon does not, and that is excellent washroom facilities, facilities for people to have barbecues and family picnics—picnic tables, drinking water and all those other things.

I support the initiative, but I have to question whether or not the initiative is going to deliver what people actually want and need. I agree that rural municipalities do not have the wherewithal or the monies or the staff to ensure that a green ribbon beach will meet the same

conditions of a Blue Flag beach in a large municipality like my own. What I would like to see, which is not contained within the body of the motion and perhaps cannot be contained because it involves money—and I understand the constraints that all members have in private members' business—if this member is successful in having her bill passed today, is that the McGuinty government properly fund beach safety, that the McGuinty government properly fund the protection and restoration of Ontario lakes, particularly the Great Lakes, and that the McGuinty government in a budget at some point properly fund the municipalities, particularly the small ones along Lake Huron where this initiative is going to take place, so that they can actually do more than just declare it a green beach. Perhaps they can do as much as meet the requirements of a Blue Flag beach; they can put in picnic tables and washroom facilities, they can put in clean potable drinking water in all of the areas, so that they can meet the international standard.

To state that simply, you want to have an environmentally sound beach is a good thing, but to do something to ensure that the entire world knows about it is certainly something else. If this member is serious, then I would suggest not only is it the passage of this motion, but it is forcing the government to do the right thing and to fund those small municipalities so that they too can meet international standards.

I have occasion from time to time to spend some of my holidays along Lake Huron. My wife in particular thinks that the town of Goderich and the town of Bayfield are two of her favourite places not only in this province, but in the world. She would recognize that on the beaches of those communities, as well as those in Southampton, Grand Bend, Kincardine and all the other beaches and towns up and down that wonderful coast, they have a similar opportunity to what we enjoy in Toronto.

So I encourage the member not only for having put this forward, but I also encourage her to go the extra mile and convince her government that funds should be spent on this worthwhile endeavour, and not just to be content with having a green ribbon beach. As good as that may sound, it's not going to bring people and tourists into that area, because they're not going to understand the importance of green ribbons, whereas internationally, they certainly will understand when they see a blue flag flying above each of these cities and towns and their respective municipal beaches.

I would be remiss, though, if I did not talk about something else in my community, which is the effect that the wonderful Blue Flag beaches have in bringing people in our communities down to the waterfront in the summer months, in bringing people from around the world to discover how beautiful Ontario and Toronto are in this respect—and then to have again an assault on our neighbourhoods in close proximity to those beaches. I'm speaking about the assault that is taking place just west of Beaches–East York and the riding of Toronto–Danforth, but certainly within eyesight of the border, of big-box

retail moving along Eastern Avenue and all of the lands south of Eastern Avenue which were supposed to, in Toronto's dream, be used for parks and recreation and beachfront. Instead, what we are seeing is developers moving in, in a great way, with the support not of the city of Toronto, but with the support of some provincial agencies, to turn what was supposed to be parkland and beachfront into big-box retail.

I don't have to tell you what that's going to be like, because I have been to many small towns where I have seen the downtowns completely gutted. I remember in particular going to Brantford and seeing not a single store open in that once-vibrant community, and everybody is out by the Wal-Mart. I have to tell you, we don't want that experience around our Blue Flag beaches. We don't want the experience of having Queen Street, which is probably the finest shopping street in all of Canada in terms of small stores and individual, friendly service, turned into a ghost town, that has been visited upon so many small towns in Ontario, where big retailers have built on the outskirts of the town and literally siphoned and sucked the life right out of the communities. We do not want the deleterious effect in our community of neighbourhoods being destroyed, of traffic increasing, of parking and pollution, the loss of potential parkland.

We have already seen a great opportunity lost when this government chose to steamroll ahead with the Portlands Energy project, a place that was supposed to have been parkland, a place that was right on the waterfront, and a place which has now been lost for generations. We are asking this government not to lend your support and your credibility to those who would build big-box retail. The city of Toronto is not supporting it, but the developers have said that they intend, with their army of accountants, their army of planners and their army of lawyers, to descend upon the Ontario Municipal Board where they intend to get what they want. We are asking, if this government is serious about Green Ribbon beaches, is serious about blue flags and the environment, is serious about neighbourhoods, to do one more thing other than pass this motion, and that is to put a stop to the abomination that is about to be descended upon my community.

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I think that's all I have to say on this particular issue. I wish the member well. I hope that the green ribbon program will make even better those communities along Lake Huron, but I ask that the members of her government really take a close and serious look at what doing nothing in terms of environmental initiatives in my community and doing far too little in her own is wreaking upon the people of this wonderful province.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to stand up and support my colleague the member from Huron-Bruce and her resolution, the green ribbon initiative. It's a very good initiative, especially because the member comes from the area. It's also important to me as a member from London, where we're trying to create a water project called HELP. This project is going to feed London and the surrounding

area. It's going to provide for almost 6,500 square kilometres in the whole region. I think it's important for us to have Lake Huron protected and safe and clean.

Before 2003, the environment was all about Walkerton; after 2003, there are many different initiatives. You have the greenbelt, which is the best-protected area in the whole world, and initiatives including the Clean Water Act—which is, I believe, the most important bill in the whole history of the province of Ontario—to protect wells and water in our province.

I remember when the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington was in Cornwall. He stood up in his old capacity with his group to protest that bill. He doesn't want the government to pass that bill, because he believed strongly back then that it's not our responsibility as a government to interfere in any issue concerning the people of Ontario. Despite his position and his party's position, we passed that bill to protect our environment, to protect our water sources, and to make sure the people of this province drink safe water.

That's why this resolution is important to us as a government, to us as a society, and to me as the member from London-Fanshawe. We are going to benefit a great deal from this project, because we want to make sure that the sources of water we're going to drink from in the future will be clean and also safe.

I want to congratulate the member from Huron-Bruce, who always brings forward great initiatives, and also for being a great advocate for her constituents and the whole area. She brings a different perspective because she served as a municipal councillor for a long time, and she knows first-hand the important issues for her community, especially when it comes to protecting lakes and water shores. Many people come from across the province of Ontario and sometimes the United States to visit and enjoy the beaches in her riding. I think she has a vested interest in creating initiatives to protect those shores and beaches, because it is important. She wants tourist activity in her area. She wants people to come from across Ontario, the United States, wherever, to enjoy clean beaches. She also wants to recognize the people who protect those waterfronts and make sure they are clean and safe for all the people who want to visit.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I want to end by congratulating the member for Huron-Bruce, and also to say that I'm going to support this resolution.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join the discussion this morning on private members' business and the resolution brought forward by the member from Huron-Bruce: that, in the opinion of this House, the green ribbon beach program, an important environmental initiative proposed by the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, be supported. I just wanted to get that on the record for those watching at home so they can catch up to the debate.

With respect to some of the qualifications the member spoke about, we always want to praise those people who want to gather in our communities to help us have clean-

er beaches in our areas. This is proposed by her riding. It's a good plan. What can you say that we cannot praise and we cannot encourage? This is what we want to do, encourage and educate people about the need to work together to have a cleaner environment. I certainly have a lot of wonderful areas in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, beaches along my rivers and lakes, some right in the downtown sectors. Bobcaygeon and Fenelon Falls have public beaches. I know Fenelon Falls had a bit of a problem last year with their public beach, but we're going to be open for business, we hope, this year.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I've got to tell you, they love that in Kinmount.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, the member from Peterborough always likes to engage in conversation: We certainly have a lovely beach area in Kinmount, in a park area, a rehabilitation that I can say was community driven by the Austin Sawmill, and their family, and how that cleanup has occurred. It's a beautiful park that they all bike, and the trails go through. So that's good.

We had a little bit of a tough issue last year. I'll remind the members about the carp issue and the challenging time that invoked in our waters when we had many factors aligning. We had a large carp die-off and they washed up on shores and beaches and went through many of our lake systems on the Trent system. It was great that the community—the permanent residents, the cottage owners who are seasonal, the municipality—worked very hard. We were hoping for a little bit more assistance from MNR, but they did what they could with the resources they had to help clean up the issue and not affect our tourism. The health unit was involved. An unpleasant situation, it took a while to clean it up, but as I have mentioned, everyone came together and worked really hard at disposing of the carp issue.

The member for Huron-Bruce mentioned in her remarks the importance of stewardship, and I'd like to comment for the hard-working farmers. I know she has many in her riding, as I have in mine. They're certainly the stewards of the land. Obviously, they want to do the best practices possible on their land. They reap their income, or they try to these days, from the resources of the land, and they are great environmental stewards. They want to work with government. I know there are a lot of regulations out there that certainly make it a little more difficult. A program that the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant often talks about is the ALUS program, more of the carrot-engaging education approach, whereas the last few years the farmers have felt it has been regulation and more hammers. I think that's just something we need to keep in mind.

The member for London-Fanshawe brought up the Clean Water Act. Many of us in the Legislature this morning were on tour with the Clean Water Act. The points that were made—and a lot came out, especially in Peterborough, which certainly was the closest hearing that we have to my riding. A lot of what was brought forward—and they were correct—was the downloading on

to the municipalities. They're saying source water protection should be a provincial responsibility, so we want to make clear that the studies go out, the committees are set up. We're hoping that the government watches very closely, because we felt, and the municipalities certainly felt, it was another download on to the municipalities and it really should have been the provincial responsibility for source water protection. We fought that battle many times here, but I just wanted to highlight that again it was more of a stick approach, not the carrot approach that we would like to see, especially in rural Ontario.

I know my colleague for Simcoe-Grey wants to speak in a few minutes, so I'll start to wrap up. The last couple of Auditor General's reports have been titled Neglecting Our Obligations and Reconciling Our Priorities. There are some good points in both of those. It speaks to this bill we're supportive of. Why would you not be supportive of this private member's resolution coming before us this morning? But the Liberal government really has to have some accurate policies and make the environment more of a priority than it has in a lot of respects. There are a lot of priorities in the environment out there. Today we're supporting the resolution brought forward by the member for Huron-Bruce.

1130

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation does important work protecting and restoring the Lake Huron coastal environment and promoting a healthy coast system. New Democrats support these goals, not just in regard to Lake Huron, but with respect to all lakes across Ontario.

The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation fait un travail important afin de protéger et de restaurer l'environnement riverain du lac Huron et de faire la promotion d'un écosystème riverain sain et en santé. Nous, les néo-démocrates, appuyons et faisons la promotion de ces buts, pas seulement pour le lac Huron mais pour tous nos lacs en Ontario.

It is for those reasons that we have taken such a strong stance against the actions of the McGuinty Liberal government which have put our lakes in jeopardy. One such example is the infamous Highway 404 extension in northern York region.

Nous, les néo-démocrates, nous sommes opposés avec vigueur contre les actions du gouvernement McGuinty qui mettent nos lacs en péril. Un bon exemple est la fameuse extension de l'autoroute 404 au nord de la région de York.

This \$250-million extension of Highway 404 carves through the greenbelt and will fuel sprawl along the northern boundary of south Simcoe county. Mr. Speaker, \$250 million would protect and restore a lot of degraded lakes and shorelines in Ontario, including Lake Huron and Lake Simcoe.

Le gouvernement dépense présentement 250 \$ millions pour l'extension de l'autoroute 404, 250 \$ millions qui pourraient être utilisés pour protéger et restaurer plusieurs de nos lacs, de nos environnements riverains du

lac Huron, du lac Simcoe, et, laissez-moi ajouter, du lac Simon, du lac Charles et du lac Kelly.

In my riding, hundreds of constituents are meeting regularly to try to restore and protect Kelly Lake, Simon Lake, Mud Lake, McCharles Lake. Every summer, all of those lakes are so full of algae that you could walk across them. The people have gotten together, pooled their resources, and have tried everything. They've tried raking the algae out and letting it dry on the beach; that didn't work. Then the next year, Science North helped us a little bit by giving us one of their scientists. They thought that bales of barley could help. So here we are putting chicken wire around bales of barley, and Javex bottles to make them float, to try to protect the shores of all those lakes—mainly Simon Lake and McCharles Lake. It helped a bit, but by the end of summer the lake was green again. They've banned fertilizer completely. Nobody on the shores of those lakes or the feeders will use fertilizer, but to no avail.

There are solutions, but those solutions take money. They turned to the municipalities. Well, the municipalities are having a tough time balancing their books right now. With all of the downloading of provincially mandated programs that are now being funded by our municipalities, they don't have the cash to help people who want to improve their lakes, who want to do the type of work that the member is suggesting happen in our ridings. In the riding of Nickel Belt, people would like those environmental projects to take place, but the municipalities can't help, and the provincial government is not helping either. But we have \$250 million being invested in a project that would actually be detrimental to Lake Simcoe and they have no problem with that.

Dans mon comté, nous avons une série de lacs qui commence avec le lac Kelly. Ça s'en va dans le lac Mud, ça s'en va dans le lac Simon, puis le lac McCharles. À chaque été, le lac devient plein d'une espèce d'algue bleue-verte qui remplit le lac. On dirait vraiment que tu pourrais marcher sur l'eau comme dans la Bible. Les gens qui demeurent dans mon comté, les gens de Nickel Belt, se sont rassemblés, ont tenu des réunions publiques, et ont essayé une série d'options.

La première option, c'est que tout le monde a raclé les algues. On les a raclés sur la plage pour essayer de les laisser sécher et voir si cela pourrait aider. Ça n'a pas aidé. L'année suivante, Science Nord nous a aidés avec un de leurs travailleurs qui s'y connaît beaucoup en écosystèmes riverains, et il nous a proposé d'y mettre des balles d'orge. Donc, on a mis de la broche à poulet autour des grosses balles et on les a mises sur la glace en hiver avec des bouteilles pour savoir où elles étaient. À l'arrivée du printemps, tout ça a coulé au fond du lac. Cela aidait un peu à enlever des algues, mais il y en avait encore beaucoup. Tous les gens sur la rive ont arrêté d'utiliser des fertilisants pour être sûrs que ça ne se retrouve pas dans le lac, mais ça ne marche pas. C'était des solutions que les gens ensemble pouvaient faire. Cela n'a pas marché.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am delighted to be able to stand here today and support this significant and important resolution put forward by my friend the member for Huron–Bruce, a member who has shown great interest in the health of the Great Lakes and a member who has shown great interest in the opportunities that the Great Lakes provide all of us who share a coast on Lake Huron.

In my particular constituency of Algoma–Manitoulin, I have the pleasure of representing the largest coast in all of Ontario. My coastline goes from about halfway across Lake Superior, through to Sault Ste. Marie, and all around the north shore of Lake Huron. It includes all the shoreline for Manitoulin Island, Cockburn Island and St. Joseph Island. It includes many of the islands in Georgian Bay.

For my friend from the official opposition who didn't understand "coast," I'm sure that his friend from Halton might remind him of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, which describes most of my constituency.

About 75% of the coastline in my constituency is protected, either through a provincial park, a federal park or a First Nation. Less than 25% of the coastline within the constituency is actually in private hands. It is important for us to preserve this. This is the largest single repository of fresh water in the world. This is important for us to do, and it is important for us to understand what the member is proposing. She is proposing a volunteer program. This is not big government in action; this is community volunteers who will develop and encourage beach stewardship.

A candidate beach will have a beach stewardship committee of local people who are interested in looking after their particular beach. It seems to make great sense in the rural areas. As the member has said, there are restrictions on what a small municipality, a small group of people in a county or a district, can do. They can't beat the standards of the Blue Flag program, but they can demonstrate to local residents, to the tourists who visit all of the Lake Huron coastline, to those who come and spend time along the Lake Huron coastline at their summer residences, that it is an important thing to do.

I commend the member for this very, very important resolution today; I think that it deserves the support of all members here.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm also delighted to stand for a few minutes and to recognize the work that the member for Huron–Bruce is doing to promote the green ribbon beach program. Contrary to what one of my other colleagues said, that it was fluff, I think it's a great program. He made a point that there are other things to debate, but this is private members' hour and a great opportunity for her to come forward and to promote Lake Huron, the part of the Great Lakes that she represents.

Of course, I want to spend a couple of minutes thanking the government for the \$100,000 to market Wasaga Beach, which we received last week. We did have a fire that removed many of the historic buildings going back to the 1940s, but I want people to know that the buildings have all been demolished. There's a clean slate there. We

look forward to new and exciting times at Wasaga Beach, in terms of redeveloping, and we have a lot of proposals.

1140

I want to thank the very able council, led by Mayor Cal Patterson, who have taken a very sensible approach not only toward marketing Wasaga Beach for the summer season coming up, but also toward dealing with the requests from developers and really involving the community; and the committee led by Bonnie Smith, our economic development officer, under the auspices of the economic development committee of council, is moving forward, involving the community, and making sure that we not only get the message out that we're open for business on the world's longest fresh-water beach—and I think it would be fantastic to at some point be able to designate parts of this beach under the green ribbon program. It can't hurt. It's another way to put Wasaga Beach and other beaches on the map. I think it would be great for tourism. When people look at a tourism guide in the future and they may be able to see the designation of a green ribbon, they'll know it's a clean beach that's protected, that volunteers care about it, that the world-famous Wasaga dunes are protected, and the long grasses and bushes that help to avoid erosion along the Great Lakes. Those are world ecosystems and they need to be protected. A green ribbon designation, I think, would go some way towards that.

So again, congratulations and thank you. This is the first time in my 17½ years that a member of an opposing party actually gave me their speech to read. Unfortunately, I don't have enough time, but very good speech-writing there, I'll say to Carol Mitchell.

I just want to say I hope there will be some money coming to those municipalities that decide to participate in this program. They won't be able to do it on their own.

Finally, I just want to say that today is a good step in recognizing what volunteers can do and what a program can do to put you on the map, as I said, but the Great Lakes water levels are a very, very serious issue. Not a week goes by where, I'm sure for all of us who are around the Great Lakes, our constituents don't mention to us that they're very concerned. The real estate agents up in Wasaga Beach will tell you, "We're selling mud rather than beach right now." Certainly in my 15 years—almost 16 years—of living in Wasaga Beach, raised in Alliston, I've never seen the levels so low. That's something the government needs to address, with the federal government.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the resolution here today from my colleague from Huron–Bruce. I certainly know that she has been a real leader in water quality and restoration of beaches in her community for many, many years.

I'd like to get on the record this morning that previous to her election here in 2003, she is the only person in the 100-year history of Huron county to have two terms as a warden. During those two years that she was the warden of Huron county, this was one of the key issues that she put forward—this whole issue of stewardship, making

sure that beaches were in top quality, that indeed all of the community that surrounds the area of Huron–Bruce has an opportunity to get access to beaches, that her citizens and all citizens of Ontario know that they can be very, very safe and rely on the water quality at those beaches.

You might ask why a member from Peterborough would be supporting this resolution. Interestingly enough, I like to give credit where credit is due: to the Honourable John Baird, the federal Minister of the Environment. About a year ago, he launched a study to review the Trent-Severn system in east-central Ontario. The Trent-Severn system, of course, starts in Trenton, Ontario, and works its way up through to Port Severn, which drains into Georgian Bay, an integral part of the ecological system in eastern and east-central Ontario. One of the individuals who has been part of that panel, that study, was the founding president of Trent University, Tom Symons. Through a whole series of public round tables over the last number of months—and I understand this report will be coming forward in the not-too-distant future—beach quality and the quality of water through the Trent-Severn system as it enters both into Lake Ontario and to Lake Huron via Georgian Bay was a topic of great discussion.

We know that the proposal we have here this morning is a volunteer approach. It will allow for that call to arms for people in those communities. We all know that part of our legacy to future generations is to provide an environment that is of pristine quality. Part of that environment, of course, is water quality, and associated with that is beach quality. I know the member from Huron–Bruce, through various conferences in her community, is certainly taking this initiative forward. She is taking that message to the various communities in the riding of Huron–Bruce and actively seeking out those volunteers who will, when the call to arms is put out, come forward because they know this is an important thing to do.

In 2007, Peter Lougheed predicted that the United States will be coming after our fresh water in three to five years. So we know that there is a real challenge, a real responsibility for us here in Ontario to make sure that water quality within the five Great Lakes, and water quality in all our systems across the province, affords those tourism opportunities and provides those opportunities for high-quality water that you and I can enjoy each and every day.

This is a very serious issue, and all members of this House should be on board to support this resolution.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I'll say right from the outset, I'm a very strong supporter of this resolution that has been put forward by the member for Huron–Bruce. I think if any member of the House has ever had the opportunity, or has not availed themselves of the opportunity to go and see a sunset in the town of Southampton, Ontario—everybody should experience that at least once in their life. I've seen it on a number of occasions and every time I see it, it's like I'm seeing it again for the first time.

There are a few things I think all members in this House would agree with, and that is the legacy we pass on, from an environmental sense, to our children. There are a few basic things. I think we'd all agree that children should be allowed to walk in the woods in the future. If you extend that, you would say that children should also be allowed to play on the beach and that children should be allowed to swim in the water that adjoins that beach. I'm sad to say that in my own town of Oakville—we have some wonderful beaches—children aren't allowed to swim in the water. Children aren't allowed to go in the water and on the beaches in Oakville because of activities that have taken place in recent years. Under all three parties, activities have taken place that have harmed that water, and we haven't done enough to protect that resource.

I was fortunate, before I became an MPP, to serve 18 years as a member of regional council. One of the things that afflicted the Lake Ontario shoreline in Oakville was algae. We had a huge algae problem, algae washing ashore and rotting on the beaches, washing up on the shoreline and rotting and smelling, disturbing the normal activity that you would see along a lakeshore or beach. We're starting to see that in other areas of the province now.

I chaired a committee called the Lake Ontario Shoreline Algae Action Advisory Committee. It came up with a number of great recommendations, working with the Canada Centre for Inland Waters and with the University of Waterloo. We're starting to see the same initiatives now taking place in Lake Simcoe.

When you look at the importance of the issue, when you look at the importance of this resource to the future of our province, both economically and recreationally, from a sport fishing and commercial fishing point of view, there are a number of very important reasons why all members should be supportive of this resolution that is put forward.

Once again, I'd like to thank the member for bringing it forward because it gives us a chance to talk about environmental issues as well. At the same time, you can see where you can make a successful program, such as a blue flag program in the urban areas, which has been, by one member's admission, a very successful program. You can adapt that to the rural areas and make it even more successful in the areas that simply don't have the facilities or the amenities that you would find in an urban area.

I heard the remarks—and I thought they were excellent remarks. I want to compliment the member for Simcoe–Grey. I think private members' time is a time where you can put some of the partisan politics aside and you can speak on behalf of your own constituents. Certainly, I thought the remarks that he came forward with, after some of the remarks by other members of his party, were a saving grace, and he deserves to be complimented for them.

I know in my own riding, for example, in recent elections, the third party isn't the NDP any more. The

third party in the riding of Oakville is now the Green Party. The NDP is now the fourth party. When you look at the type of debate that is taking place, when choices are being made about environmental issues, those people who are engaged in those issues look to two parties to provide them with the sort of debate and the sort of choices they're looking for. One, of course, is the Liberal Party, to which I belong, and the other is now the Green Party. I think in my riding and I think in a number of other progressive ridings, the issue of the environment has certainly risen to the fore.

When you see a resolution that is drafted the way this one is, in a very sensible way, in a practical way, involving an organization with the credibility of environmental defence, it's worthy of support of all members of the House. So, in closing, I would like to compliment the mover, and I would also like to urge all members of this House to give their utmost support when the vote is taken.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Mitchell, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I want to thank all the speakers today, but I just want to make a very short comment about the comments that were made today. I'm very disappointed in the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I think it's very unfortunate that one does not understand the difference between rural and urban communities. We rely on our strong volunteer base; we rely on our grassroots community. It's unfortunate that he simply doesn't get it. I'm going to let it go at that.

But that's it. The other members, the kind words, the recommendations that you've made, strengthening the green ribbon program, I thank you for that. The member for Simcoe–Grey: Quite frankly, I found your comments refreshing and I wanted to make special note. I thank you for that.

The member for Beaches–East York as well. I want to remind the member for Beaches–East York that we have two Blue Flag designations in the riding of Huron–Bruce. We want to work the two programs together, which I know the member understands, but I just want to strongly reinforce it: We simply don't have the resources to do Blue Flag in all of our communities, but my communities want to work together because they understand that a strong ecosystem is the future for our riding.

Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct honour of having my daughter here today. I want to recognize my daughter Jas. For all of you who have heard me talk repeatedly, this is the one who's the chef, who keeps me eating better now.

For all those who spoke, I really do sincerely appreciate it. This is a very important initiative in the riding of Huron–Bruce. We want to ensure that our coastline is there to enjoy and to prosper for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There being no further debate, the members will note that we're a little bit ahead in schedule this morning. In private members' public business, other members can expect the vote to take place at noon. In that case, I will suspend

proceedings until 12 o'clock, at which time we will deal with the two ballot items.

The House suspended proceedings from 1152 to 1200.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you for your patience and understanding.

POVERTY PAUVRETÉ

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time allowed for private members' public business having expired, we'll deal first with private members' notice of motion number 22, standing in the name of Ms. Aggelonitis.

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

Agreed to.

WATER QUALITY QUALITÉ DE L'EAU

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with private members' notice of motion number 23, standing in the name of Mrs. Mitchell.

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

Agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1201 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I rise today to pledge my enthusiastic support for the proposed expansion of Wilfrid Laurier University to Milton. A satellite campus on a beautiful 150-acre plot of land near the Niagara Escarpment—and that will be part of a 450-acre development—would be beneficial to many people. Students would be able to learn in a natural and modern setting, benefiting from Milton's quaint yet cosmopolitan charm. The town of Milton would inherit a burst of youthful energy and the incentive to develop a modern and sustainable student village. The construction, maintenance and operation of the campus would create many local jobs for the residents of Halton, bringing new commercial opportunities within and without the university.

Truly, I can think of nothing more fitting for this rapidly growing community than the presence of an established and reputable university like Wilfrid Laurier. I encourage both the university and the town of Milton to

come to an agreement as quickly as possible, and I expect significant support from this government in the future.

HILLIARD GREEN

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: There are times in this job when you have to say farewell to a friend, a friend who provided you support when you first started out, a friend who saw your community for what it could be, not just what it is. Nepean–Carleton recently lost a good friend, on March 3, when Hilliard Green departed this life for his great reward.

Hilliard saw something in me when I was just 30 years old. He was one of the first people to believe that I could be a member of provincial Parliament, so he made that happen, just as he has done for so many other provincial and federal Conservatives in Nepean–Carleton throughout his lifetime.

Hilliard succumbed to the dreaded cancer. His battle with the disease was even more stressful when his beloved wife, May, passed away from the very same illness two years before he did. He was a good man. His farm, Abby Hill Farms, has some of the best sweet corn around, though I privately prefer the apples during the fall. Hilliard was a big Ottawa Senators fan and he was ever the horseman, showing his horses at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, among other venues. Hilliard also loved the Richmond Fair. He was a director and a former president there. He knew everyone in Richmond, and when I first started out as a politician, it was there that he and others gave me my start.

Hilliard leaves behind two sons, Neil and Graham, and his mother, Fern. He also leaves behind several in-laws in the Preston family who loved him like a brother.

Nepean–Carleton lost one of its finest on March 3, and for that I'm sad, but I will forever be grateful for having known Hilliard Green.

SHERIDAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED LEARNING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I rise to inform this House about a recent visit Minister Smitherman and I made to the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. Sheridan's Davis campus recently opened its new Centre for Healthy Communities, a unique facility that brings together innovative wellness and community safety disciplines in one location. This centre will train students to become personal support workers, security officers, pharmacy technicians, practical nurses and experts in health promotion.

Our government's strategic investment in Sheridan has not only improved access to post-secondary education in Peel, but it has also created jobs in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. Our government understands that in order to create the workforce of tomorrow, we need to invest in education and skills training today. That is why in last week's budget we proposed \$1.5 billion for

skills training through the skills-to-jobs action plan. We want to ensure that more Ontarians have access to student aid, apprenticeship training and well-paying jobs.

I would like to thank the staff and students at Sheridan for their warm welcome, and I'm very proud to have the centre in my riding. I look forward to continuing to work with Sheridan to ensure that our government continues to invest in our students.

TOWN OF CALEDON

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Today I'm pleased to rise to inform all members of the Legislature about an honour that was recently bestowed on the town of Caledon, in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon. Maclean's magazine, in their March 24 issue, named the town of Caledon the safest place to live in Canada. The "safest place to live" designation is based on per capita crime data from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. I would like to ask all members of the House to congratulate the town of Caledon on receiving this recognition.

I would especially like to acknowledge the work of the Caledon OPP and the volunteers who serve with the Policing Advisory Council of Caledon. There has always been outstanding community support for the Road Watch, Citizens on Patrol and Youth Leadership programs. Hundreds of volunteers have dedicated many hours to making Caledon a safe community to live, work and raise a family.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison, when asked why Caledon deserved this honour, said, "Our residents get involved in our community; our police listen to our community and we have a wonderful group of volunteers who care and work hard for our community." I couldn't agree more.

Congratulations to Detachment Commander Andy Karski and the Caledon OPP, who serve us so well in Caledon. It really is a very special place to live, and I am proud to acknowledge them in the chamber today.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Toronto Sun last November noted that Ajax teen Shaquille Wisdom hanged himself after being viciously cyber-bullied by classmates about being gay. Bullying of LGBTTIQ teens is well documented. Due to prevailing homophobia and harassment, gay teens are 14 times more likely to attempt suicide than other teens and have a death rate three times higher than other teens. Egale Canada says that LGBTTIQ teens are more likely to be threatened with weapons, drop out because of harassment, and feel forced to leave home because of conflict.

Today I stand demanding action on behalf of at-risk children from the McGuinty government. We need assurance immediately that programs for equity education, anti-bullying programs and disciplinary programs be instituted before another death occurs. The Toronto board of education has pioneered equity education and anti-

homophobia programs. These need to be applied province-wide now—not sometime, not never, but now.

I want to thank Egale Canada for advancing equality and justice for LGBTTIQ people and their families and Joanne Cohen of the Bruce E. Walker Law Office for their tireless advocacy in this regard.

CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Kim Craiton: This week marks the start of the Canadian Cancer Society's Cancer Awareness and Daffodil Month throughout our province.

Today, two in five Ontarians will develop cancer at some point in their lives. This is much more than a statistic, as some of us are acutely aware. That fact represents thousands of cancer stories. These stories motivate over 15,000 Ontario volunteers to go door to door to sell daffodils in the month of April to deliver hope to our constituents.

Since the daffodil campaign began 50 years ago, the Canadian Cancer Society has made significant progress in the fight against cancer through research, education, advocacy, and assistance to those living with cancer. Today, 60% of people diagnosed with cancer will survive the disease, compared with just 33% a few decades ago. Early detection is a plus, and the daffodil campaign certainly helps the society get that message out.

As a cancer survivor, I ask all Ontarians, when a volunteer comes to your door, to not only buy a daffodil but to thank them for their tremendous service to our community, for what they do is important.

The cancer society has sent a letter out to each member, along with a daffodil pin to wear during the month. I'm proud to ask the House to give permission to each of the members to wear the daffodil pin in the House to recognize the month of April.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member seeks unanimous support to wear the daffodil pin in recognition of cancer. Agreed? Agreed.

CANCER SCREENING

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: As you'll be aware, prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer found in men today, affecting mostly men over the age of 50. Knowing this, I'm particularly pleased that our budget proposed to cover the cost of the prostate-specific antigen test, more commonly referred to as the PSA test, which is used to diagnose and monitor treatment of prostate cancer. It is the blood test that helps detect cancer, and it has now finally received funding.

The coverage of these tests was one part of the three-year, \$154-million investment to build on the province's cancer screening program, to increase early detection and treatment of a number of conditions, including breast, cervical and colorectal cancers; as well as extending the HPV, or human papillomavirus, vaccination program.

1340

The coverage of the PSA tests was also welcome news to my colleagues across the floor, and I'm happy to put on the record some comments. On the topic of PSA testing being covered, for example, the member from Simcoe North, in a rare moment of candour, said: "It is nice, and I want to give the government credit." The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, in a welcome moment of collegiality, said, "This has proven to be a critical diagnostic tool in this day and age ... and I am happy to see this cost being covered."

I couldn't agree more, and I commend the McGuinty government and Minister Smitherman for this initiative.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise today to speak to one of the many highlights of last week's budget.

As part of the funding for our health and long-term-care system, this government proposed an investment of \$14 million in 2007-08 for 10 residential hospices across the province. The funding will provide end-of-life care in a home-like environment for patients who cannot be cared for at home.

I know I'm not the only one who is pleased with this investment. When commenting on the \$969,000 in funding towards capital costs for Sakura House in his riding, the member from Oxford said: "I'm elated with the amount.... It's a significant achievement and it will allow them to move forward and get construction under way. It's the type of thing we like to see—it's part of the end-of-the-year spending. I'm very happy they saw fit to fund Sakura House. We commend them for that."

The member from Sarnia–Lambton also voiced his satisfaction with the \$1.5-million investment slated for the St. Joseph's Hospice in his riding when he said, "I can't be too negative when we receive funding we asked for."

I couldn't say it better myself. Clearly, this is important funding for a very important purpose, and I'm pleased that our government is making these investments.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Bob Delaney: Last week's budget announcement included some significant investments in our province's infrastructure.

Ontario's budget proposed a \$1-billion investment for municipal infrastructure in 2007-08, with funding for our roads and bridges, public transit and social housing.

Let me quote from some of the very positive feedback about Ontario's budget. Doug Reycraft, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, said that he is "extremely pleased to see the investment in infrastructure." He went on to say that "in order to be globally competitive, we need to invest in infrastructure."

In my own city, Mayor Hazel McCallion said, "Investing an additional \$1 billion in municipal infrastructure

means more job creation, sustainable, competitive communities, and a better quality of life for Ontarians."

And perhaps a quote that truly encapsulates these sentiments was made by the mayor of the Township of East Ferris, who was also the PC candidate in the 2007 election from the riding of Nipissing. He said, "The fact that the Ontario government kept their promise; they kept their promise toward infrastructure renewal and like this morning, me getting \$223,000 for my small township ... my taxes are going to be low this year because of the fact that the government has committed to reducing the impact on my taxpayers...."

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members, we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery Mr. Xue He and a delegation from the People's Republic of China. Mr. He is a member and deputy secretary general of the standing committee of Jiangsu Provincial People's Congress. I would like to point out to the members that Jiangsu and Ontario have had a formal friendship accord since 1985. Please join me in welcoming our guests today.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: Further to section 21(a) to (d) of the Legislative Assembly standing orders, I filed a point of privilege with respect to the privileges and rights—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the member for the notice that she did provide me. It wasn't as detailed as I would've liked to have seen, but notwithstanding that, I will allow you to make your point.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I intend to make my point.

I filed a point of privilege with respect to the privileges—and no disrespect, Mr. Speaker—with respect to the privileges and rights I am afforded as a member of provincial Parliament, and which I feel were suppressed yesterday during the standing committee on government agencies. The circumstances where my privileges and rights as a member were compromised are outlined as follows.

In the resource binder for the standing committee on government agencies provided by the 39th Parliament committees branch, it clearly states on page 24:

"Research officers of the legislative library's research service provide every standing and select committee of the House:

"The research officer:

"—highlights and clarifies central issues before the committee;

"—prepares briefing papers for the committee members;

"—suggests expert witnesses and possible lines of questioning;

“—provides legal analyses of issues before the committee;
 “—summarizes submissions made to the committee;
 “—provides oral briefings to the committee;
 “—drafts interim and final committee reports to the House.”

After I requested a deferral to determine whether or not I would add my voice to a committee concurrence of the intended appointee, a request was made by the third party, supported by the official opposition, for more information regarding the intended appointee.

Specifically, the third party requested to have the legislative researcher to have “research to concur with the answers the candidate has provided,” after there seemed to be a discrepancy between some of the background information circulated by the clerk’s office and the testimony by the intended appointee.

This request was stifled when government members of the committee put forth the following motion: “That the opposition request for legislative research to investigate the truthfulness of Mr. Anand’s responses be put to a vote.”

As the committee resource binder clearly states: “The research officer highlights and clarifies central issues before the committee.”

In this case, the government, through its motion, attempted to muzzle the opposition in our attempt to receive reasonable, open-source and public information in order to make the best possible decision. Ultimately, because we felt pressured by the government, the opposition withdrew its request.

I never want to be put in that position again. After all, it is the rules in this place that protects the minority from the tyranny of the majority.

As it clearly states on page 5, the mandate of the committee is “to review the intended appointments made by order in council of persons to ABCs of the Ontario government. The committee may select for review intended appointees, determine whether or not it concurs in the intended appointment and then report its concurrence to the House.”

Under standing order 106(e)(8), it states: “At the conclusion of the meeting held to review an intended appointment, the committee shall determine whether or not it concurs in the intended appointment. Any member may request that the committee defer its determination to the next committee, but in the event no later than seven calendar days. In its report, the committee shall state whether or not it concurs with the intended appointments and may state its reasons.”

The request made by the opposition was made to clarify the information circulated by the clerk’s office and the statements made by the intended appointee, so that committee members could make the best possible decisions on behalf of the residents of Ontario and, as in standing order 106(e)(8), the reasons for concurrence or not.

It is my opinion that the government’s actions impeded my ability, as well as other members of the commit-

tee, to effectively act as a member of provincial Parliament because they put into question the opposition’s right to request the legislative researchers to “highlight and clarify a central issue before the committee” so that we can properly share our reasoning of concurrence or not.

As members of the standing committee on government agencies, it is our responsibility to receive accurate and truthful information pertaining to all intended appointees, review and evaluate this information to make sure the intended appointees are capable and qualified for the positions they seek, and vote accordingly. The actions of the government yesterday are clearly not in the spirit of the standing orders, the committee resource binder or of our democracy.

I do urge you to rule in favour of the “right to know” for all members of this Legislature, which will help us all do our jobs. The very foundation of our democracy is the right for the governing party to set out an agenda, the right of the opposing parties to ask questions, and the right of legislative staff to provide unfiltered, unbiased and independent advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the member again for providing me with the proper written notice under section 21(c) of the standing orders. I want to take the opportunity to review the Hansard of the member’s comments today. With that, I will reserve my decision until next week, and I thank you for that.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT, 2008

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008 SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Mr. Bartolucci moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l’Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Mr. Speaker, I’ll make a statement during ministerial statements.

PEACE OFFICERS' MEMORIAL DAY
AND MEMORIAL ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008
SUR LE JOUR DE COMMÉMORATION
DES AGENTS DE LA PAIX
ET LE MONUMENT COMMÉMORATIF
À LEUR MÉMOIRE

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 51, An Act to proclaim Peace Officers' Memorial Day and to honour peace officers who have died in the line of duty / Projet de loi 51, Loi proclamant le Jour de commémoration des agents de la paix et rendant hommage aux agents de la paix décédés dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Dave Levac: The bill provides for the declaration of a Peace Officers' Memorial Day on the third Sunday in September of each year in the province of Ontario. The bill will also require that a memorial be established in or adjacent to the legislative precincts of the Legislative Assembly to honour the memory of peace officers who have died in the line of duty.

It's important to memorialize, maintain the peace officers in the name of peace for peace. The introduction of this bill will record the lives of those who have died on duty for future generations to remember. For over 100 years, peace officers have been committed to keeping our citizens safe. Quite frankly, with the introduction of this bill, our peace officers will no longer be forgotten. I appreciate it, Mr. Speaker, and I know that you're going to introduce very important guests in the gallery today.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise today to introduce legislation to better protect animals against mistreatment and abuse. This legislation represents the first significant revisions to the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act since 1919.

As I look up into the gallery today, I am pleased to welcome a number of representatives from various partner groups, who have been instrumental in the crafting of this legislation. From the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, we have Kate MacDonald and Hugh Coghill. They are joined today by inspectors Alison McAllister, Ruth Marks, Mindy Hall, Scott Sylvia, Richard Mugridge, Connie Mallory, Darren Grandel, Kevin Strooband and Todd Menard.

From the World Society for the Protection of Animals is Melissa Tkachyk. Also in the gallery this afternoon are Angela Cerovic and Doug Raven of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, and Susan Carlyle and Karen Smythe for the College of Veterinarians of Ontario.

This is an important day for animals and animal lovers, and I am proud that these individuals could join us.

If passed, the proposed Provincial Animal Welfare Act would provide better protection for animals throughout Ontario, including those in zoos.

Sadly, this protection is necessary. While most people enjoy and respect all animals and treat their pets as part of the family, it is not uncommon to hear of acts of uncaring individuals who exploit or harm defenceless animals: the puppy AK, found whimpering on a balcony with his ears cut off; the kangaroo Tyson, held in deplorable conditions in a roadside zoo; animals trained to fight as a sport.

In Ontario, these acts, these cruelties, will not be tolerated. If passed, the amendments to the OSPCA Act would offer the strongest animal protection in Canada. It would give the Ontario SPCA agents the right to inspect places other than a residence where animals are kept for entertainment, exhibition, sale or hire; let the agents enter premises where they have reasonable grounds to believe an animal is in immediate distress; and require veterinarians to report suspected abuse and protect them from liability for doing so.

Further, the legislation would make it an offence to train an animal to fight another animal, cause distress to an animal or fail to comply with standards of care. And it would give judges the flexibility they need to impose the stiff penalties that these actions deserve.

Our government is committed to a strong animal welfare system in Ontario. Last year, we more than quadrupled funding to the OSPCA, to \$500,000 annually, to support its important work. This was the first increase in many years. We provided \$100,000 for zoo inspections, and we recognized the need to strengthen and modernize the act. Earlier this week, we provided \$5 million to improve and modernize the OSPCA's infrastructure across the province.

Today, I want to thank the OSPCA, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario and other concerned organizations for taking part in consultations to help us prepare this legislation.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my colleague David Zimmer, a strong advocate for animal protection, who last December received the World Society for the Protection of Animals' special award for leadership in animal welfare for his private member's bill. This legislation we introduced today builds upon his bill and takes it even further.

I would also like to thank my colleague Mike Colle. Mike has been dedicated to animal welfare rights for many, many years.

I also want to recognize and thank Julia Munro and Bob Runciman for their commitment to animal welfare in Ontario.

There are innumerable people and facilities across Ontario dedicated to the protection and well-being of the animals in their care in every community of this province. If passed, this legislation would have no impact at all on this majority who treat animals with kindness and concern. It would, however, allow the OSPCA to take action against those who don't, prevent those acts of abuse that are appalling to us all, and allow us to better protect animals across our province.

1400

CORPORATE TAX IMPÔT DES SOCIÉTÉS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The McGuinty government wants to help businesses do what they do best: create jobs and foster a strong economy. We believe that a streamlined, efficient and effective tax administration system is an important way to support those goals.

En ma qualité de ministre du Revenu, je prends aujourd'hui la parole pour informer la Chambre que notre gouvernement maintient ses engagements à l'égard des Ontariens et Ontariennes et envers les entreprises de la province en apportant des changements de grande envergure au système d'administration de l'impôt des sociétés en Ontario—des changements qui se traduiront par des économies de coûts considérables pour les entreprises.

Beginning this month, through an agreement that we have negotiated with the federal government and the Canada Revenue Agency, Ontario corporations will start seeing compliance cost savings from integrated audits, rulings, objections and appeals for all pre-2009 taxation years.

Plus particulièrement, à compter d'aujourd'hui même, les entreprises de l'Ontario traiteront dorénavant avec une seule autorité pour chacune de ces fonctions. Cette étape initiale sera suivie de l'adoption d'une déclaration sur le revenu des sociétés, unique et intégrée, à compter de l'année prochaine.

Going forward, Ontario businesses will have only one corporate tax return, one corporate tax administration and one set of tax rules with which to comply, not two. Through this reduction in administrative overlap and duplication, we estimate that Ontario businesses will save up to \$100 million in compliance costs every year, and a further \$90 million annually in reduced Ontario corporate income tax.

In the words of Len Crispino, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, "Corporate tax harmonization is a big win for Ontario businesses. We estimate that this streamlining will save Ontario businesses \$100 [million] to \$200 million each year in time and money, creating room for more investment in the things like human capital, new equipment and research and development that will make our economy grow."

Judith Andrew, Ontario vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has noted, "This will

save time, hassle and money in the compliance load on small- and medium-sized businesses."

The Toronto Board of Trade has said that this harmonization initiative is "like a \$100-million tax cut for Ontario's businesses," which they expect will stimulate the economy and job creation.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the staff at the Ministry of Revenue and the Ministry of Finance, as well as the staff at the Canada Revenue Agency, who are ensuring a smooth transition as we move to the new administrative regime.

Je souhaite aux ailleurs exprimer mes sincères remerciements aux membres du personnel des ministères du Revenu et des Finances, ainsi qu'à celui de l'Agence du revenu du Canada, qui gèrent avec souplesse la transition vers le nouveau système d'administration.

They have done a tremendous job and I'm very grateful for their hard work. I would particularly like to recognize the following people for their leadership in moving this initiative forward: my deputy minister, the incomparable Colin Andersen; the revenue commissioner, Angela Longo; and our project leaders who put in countless hours, Bob Laramy and Marion Crane.

This government, under the leadership of Premier Dalton McGuinty, is committed to creating a competitive environment for Ontario's businesses and taking concrete steps to build a vigorous economy that benefits all Ontarians. This initiative is just the latest example of how we are delivering on our commitments. Thank you.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of our party on the bill just introduced on animal protection. I think that there is no one who has not been touched by horrific stories of animal abuse, so that all of us recognize the importance of providing the kind of legislative framework that ensures our animals are protected.

I would also like to welcome those guests who are here today and who have participated in the consultations that the minister referenced.

I also want to recognize, as the minister graciously recognized, the role that members of our caucus have made in this particular initiative. I was always very pleased that the bill I had presented a few years ago passed unanimously in this House. One of the things that is the hallmark of any piece of legislation that anyone puts forward is, of course, its ability to stand up to the rigours of the courtroom. It was certainly another milestone, if you like, or achievement to see that we, in this province, were able to prosecute and fines of significance were imposed. As the minister mentioned, my colleague Bob Runciman has also delved into this area, I think as responsible legislators do, recognizing how important it is, borrowing the phrase, to speak for those who cannot speak.

But I want to just raise a couple of issues that I think are ones that the government is going to have to look at.

One of the things is that this bill provides for a great deal to be done by regulation. It's regulation that often creates the friction, if you like, or the burden, the onus on individuals, and so I think we have to be very careful about not casting too broad a net in legislation of this nature, particularly through regulation.

In the moment I have, I want to pick out a couple of areas that I think are ones that should be flagged. The question of taking hobby farms as a specific group is one, again, that I think people are going to have difficulty with. There would be two sets of rules: one for those that are identified as farms, and then others that somebody identifies as a hobby farm. The same animals on those two properties would be covered under different jurisdictions.

The question of warrantless entry: again, something that has to be done—I know the minister mentioned—judiciously; and the question that the animal review board can impose costs even when the party has actually won their case.

I call on the minister to ensure that we have hearings beyond Toronto. Most of these issues are of a rural nature, and it's extremely important that those voices are heard.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Tim Hudak: I thought when the Minister of Revenue stood today she was going to announce that finally the Dalton McGuinty government has seen the light and is reducing the tax burden on working families and businesses in the province of Ontario, but it's hopeful thinking. This ministry was even cancelled by Bob Rae back in 1993. It was resurrected for the sole purpose of squeezing even more tax dollars out of working families and businesses. Ironically, in 1993, Jurassic Park was released. And Dalton McGuinty's prehistoric tax-and-spend policies are driving Ontario to a Dalton McGuinty recession. I say to my friend the minister, we have heard in committee from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the CFIB, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the C.D. Howe Institute; the Fraser Institute, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and even a gentleman you recently hired, Roger Martin, at the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. The time has come to reduce the tax burden and stimulate job creation in the province of Ontario.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want to respond to the ministerial statement by the Minister of Community Safety. I want to tell this assembly that we New Democrats were particularly excited about the bill that had been put forward by David Zimmer, the member for Willowdale, in the last Parliament. Indeed, we thought that was a good beginning for a debate and the development of legislation that would address the needs of contemporary Ontario. I remember pleading with the government

House leader to have that bill called so that it could pass and go into committee. Had the government been inclined to accommodate Mr. Zimmer in that way, we'd have legislation now. I say, recalling very clearly the legislative proposal of Mr. Zimmer, we'd have had strong, effective, meaningful legislation for the province of Ontario.

1410

I've got to tell you, this, which purports to be a major overhaul of the legislation, is far from that. I would have preferred that it was a new bill, a new piece of legislation. You'll understand that, Speaker, because you, in your experience in committee, understand how restricted one is in terms of moving amendments when one is dealing with amendments to existing legislation—and that's what we are offered today—as compared to a complete, new statute. The manner in which the government has put this forward has seriously restricted the way in which this bill can be dealt with and the interests that can be addressed during the course of committee hearings. New Democrats are eager to get to work on this legislation.

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—we've heard from them many times over the course of the years here at Queen's Park—find themselves amongst the poorest of transfer-payment agencies in this province. All of the best legislation in the world, all of the best intentions, come to naught if you don't have enforcement.

Go to any given community in this province; go down where I come from—Welland, Thorold, Pelham, Port Colborne, Wainfleet—and you could have a 2,000-pound gorilla in your backyard, and if it's a Saturday afternoon, the fact is, there aren't animal control personnel there to call to come out to address the matter. That is the simple reality of it. We have not had the personnel in most of smaller-town Ontario to deal with dangerous situations involving animals, sometimes wild animals, that are at loose.

I'm looking forward to the debate. We're looking forward to seeing nimrods, fishers and other outdoors people participating in committee hearings. We're interested in seeing the agricultural community participating in committee hearings. I'm interested in people like Karel Fortyn from down in Welland, who is an acknowledged expert in reptiles and reptile breeding.

Here we are, it isn't a new act; it's amendments to an existing act. New Democrats will make an important contribution to the development of this. We'll do the best we can under the circumstances that the government has presented.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the Minister of Revenue, she has announced today that what she purports will happen is cost savings to the business community. She has stated that this will come at the compliance cost savings from integrated audits, rulings, objections, appeals pre-2009 taxation years.

But what she also said, hidden in one little, tiny sentence, I think might cause some concern to this Legislature, and that is that there will be a further \$90 million annually in reduced Ontario corporate income tax. I say that this may cause some concern because I remember that when this announcement was first made by her predecessor, people who were auditors in Ontario warned us precisely what was going to happen. They told us that when these two systems were married, there would be a loss of revenue to the people of Ontario, a loss that they estimated at that point as being some \$60 million to \$80 million. And in fact, today the minister has announced that the loss to the people of Ontario is some \$90 million.

That's \$90 million that this government will not have to help those who are poor, \$90 million they will not have to help our schools or our institutions of higher learning, \$90 million they will not have to help our cities and \$90 million they will not have in general revenue for any of the other good purposes to which it might be put.

The Ontario auditors know the case in Ontario. They know where the money can be found and how to save it. And they know that what is going to happen, and this government admits is going to happen now, is that a company located in multiple provinces can report profits wherever the costs are less, so that a company can report profits in Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick or Alberta or wherever, and not in Ontario, and therefore reduce the taxes. That will mean virtually nothing to revenue auditors in Canada because they're looking at the national picture, but it will mean a great deal to the people of Ontario who don't have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like the members to welcome some guests here to the Legislature today on behalf of the member from Brant. I'd like to welcome his guests who are here in the east gallery in support of his private member's bill: Marylee Finkle, Toby Finkle, Kirk Finkle, Lieutenant John Hosegrove, Officer Ron DeMerchant, Louis DeMerchant, Vince Murray, Scott Roberts, Rose Roberts and Adrienne Roberts. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity as well, on behalf of all members, to wish the member from Mississauga–Brampton South a happy birthday today.

MEMBER'S HEALTH

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is important: On behalf of all members, we know that one of our colleagues, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, has undergone some surgery for prostate can-

cer. We wish Ted well. We want Ted to know, if he's watching—I'm sure he is; we know how interested he is—that our thoughts and prayers are with him.

I think the message that Ted sends is one that we need to make sure we deliver to everyone. Ted's message was that he was fortunate that his cancer was caught early. He urged all Ontario men over the age of 50 to have prostate cancer testing done every year. Ted, our prayers go out to you.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to thank this wonderful group of pages. They've provided us with great service over the past three weeks. We thank each and every one of you for your service here to all members during the past three weeks. We wish each of you well in your studies and your future endeavours, and we trust that some of you may be back here one day, sitting in a different seat. All the best, and thank you again.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Today, the Royal Bank of Canada said that Ontario is being pushed "to the brink of a recession this year." Will the Premier confirm to the House today: Is Ontario facing a Dalton McGuinty recession in 2008?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Both by inclination and sense of responsibility, I'm much more optimistic than my honourable friend opposite. I haven't heard from a single economist who has projected negative growth for the province of Ontario. Many are projecting modest growth. We ourselves, in our recent budget, forecast growth of around 1.1%. It is modest. We would like our economy to grow at a healthier clip, but given some of the challenges that we have to contend with—my honourable colleague opposite knows these very well, whether we're talking about the dollar, which is now at par; or the price of oil, in the neighbourhood of \$100 a barrel; or a struggling US economy. All of those obviously have an impact on us here in Ontario, as it is having an impact when we talk about the US economy and other parts of the world. But I have every confidence that, working together with Ontarians and our businesses, we will, as we have in the past, see ourselves through the challenge and emerge stronger than ever.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier says he has not heard from an economist who has said Ontario is in a recession. I remind you of the heading, "Ontario will be in a recession in the early part of the year," from Desjardins, published March 25, 2008. Yves St-Maurice, deputy chief economist at Desjardins group, said: "Therefore,

Ontario will be in a recession in the early part of the year,” referring to 2008.

Obviously, this is something that are you not taking seriously enough, Premier, as we saw in your tax-and-spend budget just two weeks ago. From the Royal Bank report, Premier, it says, “The private sector is in contraction, with declines led by key sectors including forestry, agriculture, manufacturing, finance, insurance and real estate. Some slack emerging in the labour market confirms that the province is gearing down as companies trim operations.”

Premier, how could this be more serious? Will you act to stimulate our economy by reducing the tax burden on businesses and working families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It’s hard, on this side of the House, to understand where our Conservative colleagues are coming from day to day. In fact, even within the confines of a single question period it’s sometimes difficult to figure out where they’re coming from. On the one hand, they say we should be cutting taxes to the tune of \$5 billion, knowing that 75% of our revenues are devoted by way of expenditures to health care, education and supports for the vulnerable. On the one hand, they tell us to make cuts to those services. On the other hand—and I expect we’ll see some of that in this very question period—they’ll be asking us to fund various government services within their ridings.

You’ve got to make a choice. That’s what leadership is all about. We’ve made a choice, on this side of the House. We are in fact helping our struggling business sectors, manufacturing in particular—we’re reducing their taxes—but we insist on doing it in a way that does not compromise the quality of public services that Ontario families are entitled to rely on.

1420

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the day after the Desjardins report, your finance minister was asked five times by the media here at Queen’s Park if Ontario was already in a recession, and five times he refused to directly answer that question. I wonder what kind of information he’s sitting on—obviously something the Royal Bank has seen, when it’s saying that Ontario is on the brink of a recession. Even Roger Martin, whom you’ve hired to do a prosperity study, released a report yesterday saying that Ontario must lower corporate taxes to be competitive.

I ask you one last time, Premier, can you answer without the equivocation, are we on the verge of a Dalton McGuinty recession in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Sometimes it’s helpful to move beyond the rhetoric to reality, so let’s take a look at this report put out by the RBC. It says: “We think that the slowdown will be short-lived, with enough offsetting forces to push the economy through these tough times. Real estate markets are in healthy shape, real wages are still rising and a big dose of interest rate stimulus should provide a boost as it filters through the economy this year.”

From time to time, I get the distinct impression that my honourable colleague would relish the thought of

troublesome economic times. We just don’t see it that way. We don’t have that kind of a disposition; we certainly don’t have that kind of an outlook. We will work through these challenging economic times together with the people of Ontario and, once again, we will emerge stronger than ever.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also for the Premier. We saw a media report that the city of Edmonton’s campaign to lure Toronto university graduates to that Alberta city has been so successful that they plan to extend these job fairs to other Ontario universities. We have also heard that British Columbia has spent \$400,000 in advertising campaigns at Union Station and the University of Toronto to lure workers out west. In fact, BC’s economic development minister was standing in Union Station, handing out brochures and flowers to commuters.

Premier, this province is investing millions of dollars to educate our young people, and now they’re being poached from right under our noses because there’s a brighter future for them outside Ontario. How can you stand by and let this happen?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Given the quality of the post-secondary-education graduate that we continue to produce in the province of Ontario, it is not surprising to me in the least that other provinces and their businesses are coming to Ontario to shop for our graduates. We have 100,000 more young people going on to a college or university; we have 15,000 more young people enrolled in apprenticeship programs; we have 10,000 more young people who are graduating on an annual basis from our high schools; and we just announced a \$1.5-billion investment in a skills strategy program. It is not surprising in the least, given the fact that we have the highest rate of post-secondary education in the western world, that not only provinces but other countries are beating a path to our door, trying to call upon our tremendous human resources—not surprising in the least.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Your Minister of Labour was quoted in the report as saying that there’s competition for good workers. But what he won’t say is that where Ontario once won that competition hands down, it’s now being left behind in the dust of other provinces who understand that lower business taxes attract the investment that creates good jobs.

Young professionals earn 27% more, on average, in Edmonton than in Toronto; the average price of a home in Edmonton is 25% less than in Toronto; there’s no provincial sales tax, making workers’ dollars stretch further; and business taxes and family taxes are significantly lower. You don’t need a university degree to do the math and figure out where the better deal is.

When is your government going to get off the wrong track and bring in smart economic measures that will encourage our young workers to stay in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am confident that my honourable colleague is not in any way trying to en-

courage young Ontarians to leave the province; he's not doing anything that would result in dissuading our young entrepreneurs from staying here to make their lives here, their homes here, to innovate here and to create new jobs here.

The reason I'm so confident in our province, in our economy and in our people is because we have, through our government, given expression to what I think are the aspirations of the people of Ontario. They want us to find a way, for example, to reduce taxes in a smart way, and we are doing that specifically for manufacturing and resource-based businesses. They want us to find a way to support innovation and we are doing that as well. We've got this great new policy that we've just put out in this budget, which says that if you develop a business here, for the next 10 years you pay zero by way of income taxes, as long as you develop an idea from a college or university here in the country. Those are the kinds of exciting ideas that we'll continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, as you know, most businesses fail in the first five years, so that's a pretty good guarantee you've given them. They won't have to pay taxes. Most of them don't anyway. So that's a pretty false promise, I'd say over there.

The failure of this government's wrong-track policies can be seen in the figures: 72,000 people last year went to Alberta and Saskatchewan alone, and we can be certain that thousands are leaving every month as we speak. To add insult to injury, BC believes they're doing your government a favour with these job fairs. Their economic development minister said that British Columbia is providing unemployed workers in Ontario with an option, rather than having them sit around looking for work and driving up Ontario's cost of social services.

Premier, is this your Liberal government's clever way of driving down unemployment numbers and social service costs—sending our people out west, no hope, no opportunity in Ontario? Go west young man, fend for yourself.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There was someone else who recently said that the last place you'd want to invest in Canada is Ontario. That was shocking when we heard that statement. Perhaps it is somewhat understandable that the individual who uttered those comments was from another level of government and did not feel it was his responsibility to represent Ontario. But to hear the member opposite suggest that somehow young people should be leaving the province of Ontario or that they can't find their fortune here I think is completely unacceptable. If he wants to work with us to continue to strengthen this economy, to improve the quality of our education, to continue to cut business taxes in a responsible way, I invite him to do so.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: The Premier will already know that RBC released their forecast. It's interesting, but the RBC forecast for our province is entitled "Ontario on Brink of Recession." The Premier will note that their forecast of real economic growth for Ontario is below the McGuinty government's forecast.

Last week, the McGuinty government had an opportunity to do something to take on Ontario's economic challenges. I wonder if you can tell the 200,000 people who have lost their jobs already and the many thousands more at risk of losing their jobs why the McGuinty government was missing in action.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I guess my friend is not aware of some of the basic contents of our budget. The fact of the matter is that when it comes to job creation during the course of the past four years plus, there were 450,000 net new jobs here in the province of Ontario. The concern he raises is about those folks who have unfortunately lost their jobs. He hasn't taken into account our new \$1.5 billion investment in skills for people who find themselves in challenging times.

We think that our plan to cut taxes, to invest in skills, to support innovation, to continue to partner with businesses, constitutes an intelligent, responsible plan that is designed to help our families, protect our public services and grow this economy.

1430

Mr. Howard Hampton: As the Premier talks about his rosy projections, this is what the RBC forecast says: "The year-long trend shows that ... the private sector is in contraction, with declines led by key sectors including forestry, agriculture, manufacturing, finance, insurance and real estate."

That doesn't sound like anyone is moving ahead. It sounds like there are very big clouds on the horizon, and the RBC forecast says that things are likely to get worse.

I want to ask again: It's very clear we've lost 200,000 good manufacturing jobs already; many thousands more are at risk. Can you tell all those workers why the McGuinty government did next to nothing in its recent budget to address the jobs crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Only the leader of the New Democratic Party in the province of Ontario would dismiss \$1.5 billion as nothing. Just to elaborate a bit further, our skills-to-jobs action plan will include retraining up to 20,000 workers with new skills. It builds on the fact that we now have 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities. We have 10,000 more graduating from our high schools, and 50,000 more young people involved in our apprenticeship training programs. It builds on the priority that we continue to attach to our people.

It is with a tremendous sense of optimism that we know we can count on being able to work with our people. We've been through many difficult and challenging economic times in our history. On each and every one

of those occasions, we have emerged stronger, and we will once again.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier wants to talk about job training for 20,000 people when over 200,000 people have lost their jobs, when the mayor of Windsor is advertising that workers from that city should agitate for a direct flight to fly out to Alberta or Saskatchewan to find work.

Premier, we have outlined a number of proposals—practical things like a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit; like a real Buy Ontario strategy, instead of a 25% watered-down project which you put forward; like reasonable industrial hydro rates, so manufacturers can afford to stay in the province.

I ask again: Can you tell us why, in last week's budget, your government did next to nothing in what is a growing jobs crisis in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm getting a bit of the two-step from the leader of the NDP now. He's telling me we need to do more to help business, and at the same time of course, I expect that later this question period he'll be asking us to spend more on social programs. We've made our choices and we think they're sensible, given our circumstances.

I know that he keeps talking about this refundable tax credit. We've done something which is better and more immediate. We have \$190 million in rebates that will go out the door as soon as the budget gets passed. We have cut the capital tax for businesses by 21%, retroactive to January 2007, who are not in the manufacturing or resource sector. We are cutting the business education tax. We're accelerating that cut for northern businesses. We're extending the capital cost allowance to 2012. We have a new 10-year income tax exemption for new companies working with universities or colleges to commercialize research. Beyond that, we're extending digital media tax benefits to 2012.

We think that's a pretty fulsome package, given our efforts to juggle all these competing responsibilities. We think that's in keeping with Ontarians' desire to protect their public services.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Premier: One of the telling parts of the RBC report is that it focuses not just on Ontario but also on other provinces. This is what it has to say about Quebec and Quebec's budget: "Efforts are under way to keep the investment climate competitive both within Canada and on the international stage"—particularly with respect to manufacturing. Ironically, RBC said no such thing about Ontario's budget.

I want to ask the Premier: When Quebec can take positive steps to sustain manufacturing jobs in that province and the RBC in their report acknowledges that, why couldn't Ontario have done the same?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would recommend that the member opposite read the entire RBC report and see

what it says. The Premier quoted it earlier into the record. I'll say this, our budget is the right response to challenging times—since the fall statement, more than \$1.1 billion in tax relief, in terms of the forestry sector; that's on top of a billion dollars over the last five years.

Every group—from the Chamber of Commerce, the CFIB, and Buzz Hargrove, president of the Canadian Auto Workers—talked about how successful our capital tax elimination was for the manufacturing sector. There is no doubt that there are challenges in the economy. There is no doubt that there's more to do. But the reason our response to the economy was so well received is because it was balanced, informed, and it will see Ontario through these challenging times as we protect those vital public services that are important to our people, but important to our economy.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The finance minister refers to \$1 billion for the forest sector. What he failed to acknowledge is \$1 billion is announced and re-announced; less than \$100 million has been taken up.

This is what RBC says further about Quebec: "Manufacturers will welcome further relief via a new investment tax credit of 5% for the purchase of manufacturing and processing equipment, which is then scaled higher to as much as 40% for businesses in depressed regions of the province."

I can tell the Premier that if northern Ontario had seen something like that, if Windsor had seen something like that, if Hamilton had seen something like that, you would have people out there saying, "The McGuinty government has done something significant." But the fact is, the McGuinty government hasn't done that.

I ask the Premier again, when Quebec can bring in these kinds of manufacturing incentives, why can't the McGuinty government in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have brought in appropriate incentives that get the cash into their hands very quickly. But let me tell you what else Ontario has brought in, in January and February of this year. In January and February of this year, 59,000 net new jobs were created in Ontario. The leader of the third party conveniently neglects to mention that. There is no question that there are challenges in the economy. There are far too many families in Ontario who are not sharing in our overall prosperity, and that is precisely why we brought in our five-point economic plan beginning with the throne speech, implementation starting in the fall statement, and through the budget. That plan will help us through these challenging times. It's an appropriate response with investments through tax relief to business, training, innovation—precisely what the RBC and other analysts have called on all governments to do.

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's interesting that every time someone gets a job with a temp agency, the McGuinty government says, "Oh, there's a new job." People out there know that those jobs in the service sector often pay less than \$10 an hour—no benefits, no pension and no job security.

But if RBC congratulates Quebec, then they're absolutely gushing about Manitoba: "All combined, Manitoba is one of the better positioned provinces to weather a US slowdown ... and should remain one of the fastest-growing provinces in 2008." And they congratulate Manitoba on its diversified manufacturing sector. Why is Manitoba doing well? They have a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit. They've got reasonable industrial hydro rates. They are a province that is actually doing something. If Quebec can do it and Manitoba can do it and help to sustain jobs, where is the McGuinty government? Why is it missing in action?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The government's response, through its budget, was the right response to the challenges in our economy today. I would remind the member opposite that, in 2007, 101,000 net new jobs were created. The average hourly wage was \$19.50. Real wages were up in the economy. Modest growth will be experienced this year, according to each analyst who has reported numbers.

There is no doubt that the challenges are real. There is no doubt that government can respond to those areas that it can respond to, and there is no doubt in the minds of people such as the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, and the Ontario chamber that our investments in infrastructure, training and innovation are the right responses at this time to the challenges that are in our economy today.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: To the Minister of Health Promotion: Located on Argyle Street in Caledonia on government-owned property, within 1,200 metres of both a high school and an elementary school, is an illegal smoke shop. The children of Caledonia are buying tax-free cigarettes with no health warnings, without being asked for proper identification. We're not talking about an ice cream truck parked in front of a school. It's the sale of illegal, untested, hazardous products to the people who deserve our protection the most. As the Minister of Health Promotion in Ontario, why haven't you shut down this illegal smoke shack, particularly since it's running on government property?

1440

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'll pass this question to Minister Bartolucci.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I look forward to answering the question. Since October 2003, Ontario has taken many steps to attack illegal contraband cigarette sales, including the Tobacco Tax Act. Convictions under the act have doubled between 2005 and 2007. Over the past two years, 14 million contraband cigarettes, 112,000 untaxed cigars and large quantities of fine cut tobacco have been seized by the Ministry of Revenue's investigators and inspectors. There is still more to do, and we will continue to be very, very proactive on this issue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to go back to the Minister of Health Promotion because, Minister, this outrageous

situation falls directly within your ministry, which spends millions of advertising dollars preaching against the evils of smoking, particularly to young children. There are illegal cigarettes being sold on government property to children within a stone's throw of their school. What answers do you have for the parents of the schoolchildren in Caledonia who see this government just sitting back? It facilitates the availability of cigarettes to young children just down the street from their schools. Are you telling us the health and well-being of our children, and the children of Caledonia in this particular instance, don't hold the highest priority of this government?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think this government is telling her exactly the opposite. I am very, very proud of our smoke-free Ontario legislation. Reducing the demand for tobacco is crucial. I'm very pleased to learn from my colleague Minister Best that tobacco consumption in Ontario fell by 31.8% from 2003 to 2006. That equals over 4.6 billion fewer cigarettes. So when the member asks, are we not committed to reducing people using tobacco, I say no: We're very, very committed. We only wish that more of you on the other side supported that legislation.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. With the Ontario economy on the possible cusp of a recession, why won't the Premier assist laid-off workers who are being cheated out of their hard-earned wages, severances, benefits and pensions, and let the standing committee on general government discuss Bill 6, the only business before it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for his question. I wonder where he was when we put the budget forward, a budget that talked very much about the things that we're doing to help workers as we go through this difficult time.

The Premier has put forward a five-point plan, and a very important part of that five-point plan is investing in our workers, investing in training and investing in retraining. That's a lot of money. It goes to workers who are in need. It's something that was well received by workers across this province, and a budget that was well received by the business community across this province. We're doing more for the workers of Ontario than any province in this country. We're very, very proud of our budget.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not sure the minister knows the content of the bill from his answer; he's deflecting it. This is about fairness, security and democracy. Given that this government used its majority on the committee to block the public from speaking on my bill, where is the democracy? With companies trimming their operations or closing down, workers are getting pink slips daily. Will the Premier make sure no one is denied the wages, severance, benefits and pension that they have

earned when a plant shuts down or lays off workers? Will he move Bill 6 to public hearings immediately?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I have been in touch with the federal Minister of Labour. As the member well knows, the federal government has passed a piece of legislation that we feel was a good first step but was wholly inadequate in protecting workers. We formally asked the minister to include severance and termination pay within that bill. But what the NDP are proposing here is nothing short of a payroll tax. We feel that is irresponsible in this economy, to jack up taxes on businesses, in particular in the manufacturing sector. That is what the effect of that bill would be. We don't think now is the time to go there.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Seniors built this province that we're so proud to call home. Community groups in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore work hard every single day, whether it's LAMP Community Health Centre, Stonegate Community Health Centre, Etobicoke Services for Seniors, CANES or Storefront Humber. Groups come together to improve the quality of life of seniors and make sure they can live their lives in dignity and that they're supported.

My question for you is, what is our government doing and what steps are we taking to act as a partner in the improvement of seniors' quality of life as they live out many years in this great province?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her question. She hears regularly, as do I and all of our colleagues, from seniors, whom we spent a lot of time canvassing during the election. It was an opportunity, as it always is, to hear what's going well for them and what's not. This government responded directly to what we heard at those doors and what we continue to hear. We heard that many of them are on fixed incomes and, even though they own their homes and don't have mortgages, still they are having difficulties with their property tax. As a result of that, we have brought in an excellent program which is going to begin in 2009 and will provide grants to eligible mid- to lower-income seniors on their property taxes, beginning at \$250 and going to \$500 by the year 2010.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: As the minister said, I too have the privilege to go about my community. Whether I talk to people in Long Branch, Mimico, New Toronto, Alderwood, Islington or the Kingsway, we do hear from seniors, who purchased their home many years ago and have seen the value of that house go up, and their challenge with paying for their property taxes when they live on a fixed income. What my constituents are asking me is: How are they going to access this new funding and support by the province, and when are they going to be able to do that?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I think what my colleague has asked is really important. "It's good to hear about the

programs, but how do we get that program?" is often a question that seniors ask us.

This program begins in 2009. Seniors will be able to access the grant with the submission of their income tax returns. After they have submitted their income tax returns, eligible seniors will receive a cheque directly to them as a result. As I said, that's one of the initiatives.

I think it's also important to note that we've enhanced the existing Ontario property and sales tax credit program. We have enhanced it by \$16 million over four years. That means, again, that seniors on fixed incomes will benefit. That begins this year, and that too is accessible through the submission of your income tax forms.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: On your watch, Madam Minister, and in the riding of one of your own members, you are about to subject 100 children ages five through 12 to a 50-hour workweek. The member from Nipissing is aware of the situation. The parents of the Phelps Central Public School are running out of options and running out of time. They're reaching out beyond their community for help to save their school from closure and to protect their young children who would be forced to sit on a bus for three hours or more a day, every day.

My question is: What possible justification could there be to bus the students of Phelps Central Public School and subject them to endure the unnecessary travel time, to rob them of the freedoms we cherished in our own youth, to save a buck?

1450

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for the question. I am aware of the situation at the Phelps Central School, and I'm also aware of the advocacy and support that the member for Nipissing has provided for all the schools in her community.

The reality is that we have put in place pupil accommodation review guidelines in order to allow school boards to make decisions in consultation with their community that are in the best interests of children. That's why we have school boards—because it's extremely important that there be a consultation process and that the community have input.

Just on another note: The Near North board, over the term of our office, has had a reduction in enrolment of 18.3% of its students and has had a funding increase of 18.9%. So we are working very hard to make sure that the students of the Near North board have all the resources that they need.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Minister, five- and six-year-olds are not going to sit still in their seats for an hour and a half each way. Three hours on a bus each day in rural, northern conditions is an accident waiting to happen. These students get up at 5:30 every morning. They're going to get home and they're not going to want to do homework 10 hours later. Will they have those same

opportunities as students across the province to participate in the after-school programs?

Unfortunately, much like the current ESL situation in our province, the ministry has failed to direct this board to utilize the funding for its intended purpose. The closure of this school would contravene your own government's education policies for parent-community engagement and subject the youth of Phelps to additional hardships.

I ask you, Minister: When will you understand the needs of our rural schools and take action to give the students of Phelps the childhood they deserve?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's interesting that this is the same party that, a few minutes ago, was talking about reducing revenue and reducing taxes, and here we have a question that actually is a spend-more question. I think the disarray on the other side of the House is apparent.

The point is that this school has got a very strong school council. The member for Nipissing has been very much a part of this conversation and has visited the school in question. The other reality is that school boards have to make decisions based on the best programming for their children, for the kids in the school. We are absolutely confident that the Near North board, working with its community, is going to provide the best programming for the students in their schools.

That is the point. That is why we put the accommodation review guidelines in place, and that is why I'm confident that these students will get the best program possible.

LOW-SPEED VEHICLES

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last November, the Minister of Transportation told Torontonians who were interested in buying zero-emission, no-noise Zenn cars that they would be able to do so very soon. On February 11, my office wrote to him asking for an actual date and when he might be able to accomplish this. We have never received the courtesy of a reply. I ask the minister today: When will these vehicles be approved for sale in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Did you not get a reply? The reason I ask is that I thought I signed a reply to you. I remember reading your letter and I could—I signed a reply, so I don't know where it went along the way. I apologize to the member—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It must be Canada Post. No, I say to the member that I signed a number of letters to people in that regard.

As you know, we are consulting with the federal government in this regard as to the safety requirements. I'm very enthusiastic, the Premier's very enthusiastic, and I know my friend from East York is very enthusiastic about the possibility of these cars being on our roadways soon. The consultation that we're having with the federal government is on the safety aspects, because I know the member would share my concern that if there are any

safety problems with these vehicles, placing them on all roads in the province would be a major challenge until we address those. I think it's a great idea, though, and we're trying to address those.

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to the minister: As you know, these cars have been approved in other jurisdictions in Canada. In other provinces, they're on the road, they're actually operating, and they have almost identical safety standards to our own. Zenn cars, in my view, are the way of the future in large urban centres, and they are made here in Canada, albeit not in Ontario. They are clean. They make sense. They are wanted by many Torontonians and many people who live in Ontario. When will you say the word and make these cars available for sale? The people of this province are awfully tired of waiting.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I say to my friend that I wish it were that simple, because I'd love to see the cars—

Mr. Michael Prue: It's that simple.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, it isn't that simple. I know it's that simple on the opposition benches. The member forgets that I sat in the opposition benches for years, and I remember how simple things can be from the opposition benches.

I want to tell you that we are determined to see these vehicles on our roads. We already have some pilot projects being undergone in the province at the present time. We will see more of those. I have met with the people who are responsible for promoting and constructing these, and they are providing more information to us. So I hope at the very earliest opportunity we can see the vehicles on the road. I know the Premier is a very strong proponent of them.

I know that safety is of great concern. Your transportation critic would chastise me if I were not to look after the safety aspects of this issue, as well as all other aspects of the issue.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Last week, I had a chance to join my federal counterpart, Dean Del Mastro, and Mayor Paul Ayotte to announce 79 new affordable housing units in Peterborough that will receive more than \$5.5 million from the federal and provincial governments. This was on top of \$849,000 that Peterborough received for social housing repairs in the 2008 budget.

My constituents tell me that there's more to do when it comes to affordable housing, and I know that all three levels of government need to help to address this issue. What are we doing to help create more affordable housing in the great province of Ontario?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin my thanking the member from Peterborough who, from his time on city council in Peterborough to his time as an MPP, has been a strong advocate for affordable housing, not only in his own community and county but the province of Ontario.

On top of the 79 units the member spoke of, Peterborough has an additional 178 units already being built that have received over \$5.8 million under the federal-provincial program that was signed by the previous federal government. In addition, something we're proud of is the rent bank program that I know Peterborough and other communities have benefited from. It has saved 13,000 people from being evicted in the province of Ontario.

We have more to do. The affordable housing program expires in March 2009. That's why I was in Ottawa yesterday with provincial and territorial ministers, encouraging the federal government to come to the table and renew these agreements with all provinces and territories for the benefit of those people looking for affordable housing.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the minister for his answer. I'm proud of what this government and our colleagues in the McGuinty government are doing to invest in affordable housing in Peterborough. I know all three levels of government need to roll up their sleeves and get to work to improve affordable housing. I'm proud of the work that the federal and provincial governments, along with municipalities throughout Ontario, are doing in this area.

But I was dismayed and sad yesterday when my colleague from Parkdale–High Park said that, "...165 million federal dollars for affordable housing may be rescinded by March 2009 because of the McGuinty government's inaction on affordable housing." Minister, we need all the money we can get to get affordable housing going in Ontario. It's time we set the record straight on this issue.

Hon. Jim Watson: It probably doesn't come as much of a surprise, but the NDP got it wrong once again. It's not true. There is no expiry date, as the member from Parkdale indicated. We've already delivered \$127 million in funding through our DOOR program. We've already delivered 14,000 rent supplements as of January 1 this year. The program has opened up a second round, we hope, for another 14,000 applicants by the end of June.

We have an \$80-million aboriginal trust program. We're consulting with the aboriginal and First Nations communities. We're not simply going to go out and build houses without their concurrence and without their consultation. But we need all three levels of government to be rowing in the same direction. We need the federal government at the table. We were disappointed yesterday. We couldn't even get a commitment by Minister Solberg for a formal FPT meeting in the fall of this year. But we're not going to give up hope that the federal government will come to its senses and realize we need federal resources to make this program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1500

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, as you know, one of the most pressing issues in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is the extension of Highway 417 through and beyond the town of Arnprior. There have been some recent rumblings that work on that project is going to recommence. I'd ask you today if you could tell us what plans your ministry has for the extension of 417 this year.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thank the member for the question. It's an excellent question. Our government, as you know, is investing record amounts of money in keeping our highways in good repair, reducing congestion, improving safety and promoting the economy. In 2008-09, we're spending \$927 million for that purpose.

I know the member has read the budget and this is where he and I picked this up. On page 38 it mentions exactly what he said: "Another new project includes capacity improvements to Highway 17 near Arnprior in eastern Ontario to address growing traffic and enhance safety." So I know what he's looking for would be the detail in that particular case.

The ministry staff held a public information centre for the area last week and municipal councils were informed of this funding. So that funding is in place; he'll be happy to know that. Funding for the construction of phase one from Rural Route 29 to Division Street is in place and construction will start in 2009 and complete in 2011.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's a small part of the phase. Municipal leaders continually have told us that we need ongoing and continuous progress on this file. That's a little bit of work and we do we appreciate it. The previous government brought that highway to Arnprior. What we need now is continuous progress beyond. You will know that the federal government has given strong indication that they are prepared to share in the cost of this project, should the province make it one of their priorities.

Will you commit to putting in your five-year plan ongoing progress on 417 through Arnprior to Renfrew and beyond?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Again, a very understandable question. It's interesting, though, I must say as a preamble, that the federal government is going to fund all of these projects individually—they talk about them when members bring them forward—but that would mean a lot more federal money coming in. We would welcome that and I'd get my friend to help me out in that regard.

A detailed design for phase two from just west of Division Street to Scheel Drive is under way. The public has been participating in the design through the public advisory committee. Two public information centres have already been held and funding approval for construction of phase two will be considered in future budgets. But we're doing the work ahead of time so we can get the projects moving as quickly as possible. The

timing of construction for phase two will be determined upon receiving funding for approval for construction.

I know the member and I will both be advocating for as much funding as we can with our good colleagues in government. I'm glad to have his support for this particular initiative.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, today the Nishnawbe Aski Nation chiefs-in-assembly reached a unanimous decision to suspend bilateral discussions with the government of Ontario. I want to quote NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy: "We cannot in good conscience continue to engage in bilateral discussions with the government of Ontario while one of our leaders and his council are in jail for Ontario's failure to fulfill its duty," and he's referring to the duty to consult. But just yesterday in question period, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs said "the province had in fact discharged its duty to consult."

Premier, in view of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs' categorical statement, can you tell the NAN chiefs and assembly where and how they are mistaken?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we are entitled—there's obviously a difference here. I'm disappointed to learn that discussions have broken off and I hope that we can resume those at the earliest possible opportunity. But there is a difference of opinion here in terms of whether Ontario met its duties to consult. I think we should look to Mr. Justice Smith's ruling, where he specifically found that Ontario had in fact met its duty to consult. I think that we can rely on the judge who heard submissions and made some important findings.

Notwithstanding that, we look forward to resuming discussions with the community at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't know how much more clear the NAN chiefs and assembly could be. They said they're not breaking off discussions with the federal government; they are breaking off bilateral discussions with the Ontario government: "A unanimous decision of support for Kitchenuhumaykoosib Inninuwug ... leadership by NAN chiefs-in-assembly and the decision by NAN to suspend bilateral discussions with the government of Ontario regarding lands and resources until the immediate and unconditional release of KI chief and council." That is their position.

Their position is that the KI chief and council are in jail because Ontario did not consult. Ontario may have consulted after the fact, but that does not constitute consultation, according to Supreme Court of Canada.

I ask the Premier: What is the government going to do now that you've created a situation where there are no longer discussions between the NAN chiefs and the Ontario government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We stand at the ready, obviously, to enter into discussion at the earliest possible opportunity. If the NAN chiefs have decided that they're

not prepared to do that at this time, we regret that, but we must of course accept that.

I think we have an important difference of perspective on this. Again, according to Mr. Justice Smith's ruling, Ontario in fact met its duty to consult—

Mr. Howard Hampton: After the fact.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP says that it was after the fact, but that's not how Justice Smith saw it. And I think that if I have to choose from the submission of my learned friend opposite or the finding of Mr. Justice Smith, I tend to prefer the finding of Mr. Justice Smith.

We set ourselves out on an important journey. It will be fraught with some challenges along the way. There are some 130 First Nations in Ontario. From time to time, we will have differences, but we're bringing goodwill, we're bringing resources, and we're bringing a commitment that has been lacking for a long, long time. We want to move forward together with our First Nations communities.

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. As a teacher and administrator for over 20 years, it's been my vocation to advocate for students—students in the mainstream, students at risk and students in rural and remote communities. Both in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga and the greater Waterloo region, we have outstanding secondary schools and world-class post-secondary institutions.

The Waterloo Region District School Board has over 56,000 students; the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, over 23,000 students; the University of Waterloo and Wilfred Laurier University have well over 35,000 students; and Conestoga College's part-time enrolment is over 38,000 students. That's a lot of students.

Students are now looking for summer employment. One of the mandates of the ministry, as I understand, is to promote youth entrepreneurship. Could the minister please tell us what his ministry is doing to promote entrepreneurship with our youth?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: First of all, I would like to thank the member from Kitchener-Conestoga for asking this question. I also want to take this opportunity to wish her all the best in her new job.

The Summer Company program is one of our very successful programs, which we have already launched. Let me give you some details about it. This program is open to our young entrepreneurs between the ages of 16 and 29. If they submit a viable business plan to our enterprise centre, they are eligible to get some financial help from the government—up to \$1,500 when they submit the business plan. They can then run their own business during the summer period. During this period, we provide them with mentorships and training, and they also get another \$1,500 when they finish with the program. So I really want to make sure that entrepreneurship becomes

a viable option for our students, not just looking for employment.

1510

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: As our youth are the entrepreneurs of the future—and we all know that when you affect the future, you never know where your influence ends—this is great news.

However, in order for our youth to succeed, we need to ensure they are equipped with the proper tools. In my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, we see support to non-profit organizations that provide youth with entrepreneurial opportunities. In our schools, we see the Ontario secondary school business plan competition. This is great action by the McGuinty government and it has the potential to affect many students—in my riding alone, well over 60,000 students.

Specifically, can the minister outline the programs and initiatives through his ministry that invest in our youth in order to gain the necessary skills to equip them with the tools they need to succeed?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to thank the member again for asking the question. It's very important for us to make sure that we create a culture of entrepreneurship among our youth, because they really are our future in the long haul. So let me just talk briefly about three programs. We have a global ed program, which we started last year. It was a pilot program under which we provide experience to our youth in the international markets. There was \$1.7 million included in this budget for us to strengthen that program further.

The second program is that we have also given some money to create a youth business foundation under which youth can actually get some loans to start their own businesses. You have talked about our business plan competition, which is a widely successful program in our schools. But in addition to that, the Summer Company program actually builds on that program.

All those programs combined together actually provide quite a good basis to young entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier. You should know that the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission has not published an annual report for the entire term of your government, since 2003. In fact, the last statement was in 2003 and more recently—it is described as “the site is under construction.” Yet, Premier, it is your government that ran on those very themes of openness and the principle of accountability.

Premier, in the interest of this accountability, what will your government do to ensure that the Ontario Northland Transportation System delivers at least one annual report in your term?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much. I will share this with the Minister for Northern Development and Mines, who is responsible.

I tend to agree with the member that whenever we can it's valuable to have that kind of information available, not only to members of the Legislature but the general public. I know that when they have a lot of activities to undertake, sometimes the one that is not put on the front burner is the one of developing an annual report, and I think that is valuable information. So when I'm in my discussions with the minister, I will let him know, first of all, that you have asked the question in this House about this important matter and that it would be valuable to gather this information together as soon as possible. I know the member is, as all members of the House would be, concerned that reports be provided in a timely fashion. I'll do my very best to see that happens.

Mr. John O'Toole: Again, to the Premier, and the minister as well can respond if he wishes. It's obvious that that is a real surprise here, just by the Premier not having any notes on it at all and the Minister of Transportation going to refer it to a minister who's not here.

This is a serious, serious issue. In fact, it begs a larger question. Something you should know is that the sunshine list published yesterday has 33 employees from this very commission on the list making \$100,000 or more. If this isn't about accountability—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask that the member stick to his initial question, which dealt with an annual report from Ontario Northland.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, Ontario Northland has a report out there. The only one that's available, Mr. Speaker, is accounting that there are 33 employees on the \$100,000 list, and yet that commission is funded by the province of Ontario. Premier, what are you going to do to have some openness and accountability in your government when you've got spending going through the roof and services being delayed?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I wasn't aware that the question was designed to embarrass members of the public service, as the ongoing attack of my friends in the opposite benches who continually—and I know this embarrasses the former Minister of Health, a good friend of mine from the Waterloo area, to hear that the party is swinging to the right one more time and is attacking the public service of this province by trying to embarrass them.

I would note that all members of the Legislature happen to be on the list to which he makes a reference. So I guess firing those stones around from those of us who are in glass houses can be difficult. But I want to tell the member this: The financial statements that are audited by the Auditor General are indeed on their website. I invite the member to go the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission website to look carefully at the audited statements at that time. They're available to the Auditor General, and they're available to the member.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. The McGuinty government voted down a New Democrat private member's bill calling for 50% Canadian content in all transit purchases. In response to the NDP bill, the Premier said, "Welcome to Mr. Mauro's club. Mr. Mauro has been working on this issue for a long, long time now." Now that Mr. Mauro's bill has disappeared, leaving one to speculate on what clout, if any, Mr. Mauro had with your government, given the serious consequences for the Thunder Bay workers posed by the McGuinty government's recently announced 25% Canadian content policy and the absence of Mr. Mauro's bill, will the Premier take the opportunity to reconsider his stance and support the NDP's call for 50% Canadian content in all transit vehicles purchased in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to take the opportunity to first of all thank Mr. Mauro for his influence, for lending shape to our policy. I want to thank him for taking his responsibilities seriously, and standing up for the people of his riding, and particularly the people working at the Bombardier plant in that riding.

I also want to reiterate something I've said in the past, that the workers there were very concerned that the NDP had taken a position against expanding a subway in Ontario. I'm proud to say that our Move Ontario 2020 plan is an extensive investment in public transit, and fully 82% of the money is to go to public transit; not 25% or 50%, but 82% of the monies devoted to public transit will go into the Ontario economy to create good Ontario jobs.

PETITIONS

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: This petition is entitled "Children and Smoke-Free Cars—Support Bill 11," and is brought to me by the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit and students from I.E. Weldon Secondary School, Shona Hebert, Chantal Rogers, and Kim Web.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I thank all those who signed the petitions.

1520

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) chief Donny Morris, deputy chief Jack McKay, councillors Cecilia Begg, Samuel McKay, Darryl Sainnawap, and band member Bruce Sakakeep are imprisoned for merely protecting their land;

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government failed to consult KI before giving Platinex a mining permit on KI's traditional land that is currently under a land claim;

"Whereas the jailing of aboriginal leaders who disagree with the government is something you might see in a Third World dictatorship and not in Canada;

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

"To immediately release the KI Six, remove the mining permit from KI lands and engage in proper consultation and accommodation with KI First Nation."

This petition has been signed by several residents of northwestern Ontario, and I have affixed my signature as well.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I want to thank Sonny Sansone, a tireless advocate for the people of Scarborough, for having collected these signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 60% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many re-training programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

It's a good petition; I'm pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Laura to take it and thank her for her time being a page here.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition, and I'm going to give it to Chantal.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government through LHINs is forcing the Lake of the Woods District Hospital to cut services due to inadequate funding; and

"Whereas the Lake of the Woods District Hospital has been forced to look at closing its intensive care unit; and

"Whereas these cuts will increase risk of death among critical care patients and will increase waiting times in the emergency room; and

"Whereas eliminating intensive care in Kenora will not save the Ontario taxpayer any money as any savings will be eaten up by paying for critical care patient transfers to other centres;

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

"The Minister of Health stop the process of health care cuts in local community hospitals like the Lake of the Woods District Hospital in Kenora and realize that his local health integration networks model is another one-size-fits-all model that doesn't work in rural Ontario."

This petition has been signed by hundreds of people from the Kenora area, and I have affixed my signature as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I am pleased to join the residents of Mississauga, especially west Mississauga—this petition is regarding the ambulatory surgery centre there.

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it and give it to page Adam, who's here with me today.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition—a number of petitions, actually—from my riding of Durham. I thank the constituents for bringing this to my attention. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I'm pleased to present this, sign it in support and present it to Tola, one of the pages on her last day here at the Ontario Legislature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I support this petition. I affix my signature to it and I’m sending it by page Ramandeep.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition from the Ontario Long-Term Care Association and it’s under the theme of “Long-term care needs more than a band-aid.” Its theme reads

“Please tell government to provide the \$513 million required in this budget for the necessary additional staff and supplies, so that:

“Residents aren’t rushed to meals or left waiting for help to go to the bathroom;

“Homes can provide more weekend and evening programs, improve meal services, increase the average number of daily incontinence changes and enhance clinical assessments;

“Homes can maintain housekeeping, laundry and related services.

“Long-term care needs more than a band-aid. Our homes need the funding to make a real difference for residents now, a difference that will also reduce the strain on hospital emergency rooms.”

I’m pleased to support this and present it to Ela, one of the pages who is leaving us today.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the federal government’s employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

“Whereas over 75% of Ontario’s unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa’s unfair eligibility rules; and

“Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

“Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many retraining programs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario’s unemployed workers.”

I affix my signature, and I will allow Daniel to deliver it to the desk.

1530

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. John O’Toole: This time I have a petition that’s more formally prepared. I apologize if the previous petition wasn’t exactly worded according to the orders of the table here. This petition comes to me from the Carriage Country Baptist Church, as well as the Port Perry/Prince Albert Pastoral Charge in my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord’s Prayer from its place at the beginning of the daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

“Whereas the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer’s message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

“Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord’s Prayer;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature,” as has been done for many years.

I’m pleased to sign in support of this and my constituents and present it to Laura on her last day here at the Ontario Legislature.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion respecting this afternoon’s debate on Bill 12.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable minister seeks unanimous consent concerning distribution of time. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: I move that this afternoon's debate on Bill 12 be divided equally amongst the recognized parties.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have another point of order related to standing order 55. It's actually pretty quick. Of course, one of my highlights is to inform the House of the business for the House for next week. It's rather simple: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday will be to be determined.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That was extremely informative, Minister.

ACCESS TO ADOPTION RECORDS ACT (VITAL STATISTICS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'ACCÈS AUX DOSSIERS D'ADOPTION (MODIFICATION DE LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES STATISTIQUES DE L'ÉTAT CIVIL)

Mrs. Meilleur moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act/ Projet de loi 12, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui a trait aux renseignements sur les adoptions et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to mention that I will share my time with my parliamentary assistant.

I am honoured to rise in this Legislature today to speak in support of Bill 12, the Access to Adoption Records Act, 2008. I am proud to be part of a government that understands that people need to be free to determine their own destinies, and that also involves knowing about one's past.

I have a personal connection to this legislation, which is why I am so proud to be standing in my place today. Before entering into politics, I worked in a delivery room as a registered nurse for 14 years at the Montfort Hospital. During that time, I saw too many young mothers give their newborn babies away simply because they believed that they had no other choice. I know that no mother would be able to give her child away without holding on to a dream, a wish, that they would one day be reunited. No mother could go through life without ever thinking about that child again and wondering where they are and if they are loved.

This legislation provides mothers and fathers with access to that dream. It gives them the peace of mind that comes with knowing that their child will not have to go through life not knowing where they came from, and the parents won't have to go through life not knowing their child. We have two guests in the gallery today who understand what it means to be reunited with their families. Please join me in welcoming Wendy Rowney and Michael Grant from the Coalition for Open Adoption Records.

If Bill 12 is passed, it will usher in a new era of progress for Ontario's adoption information disclosure system.

La législation, si adoptée, fera de l'Ontario une province ouverte et progressive quant à la divulgation des renseignements sur les adoptions.

The proposed legislation will help enshrine openness in future adoption records. If passed, this legislation will allow adoptees to learn their original name at birth, the names of their birth parents, and where they were born, and birth parents to learn about the child they placed for adoption, including their adopted name, and where the adoption took place.

Cette loi comportera également un veto pour la divulgation de renseignements identificatoires pour les personnes concernées par des adoptions passées. Les personnes dont l'ordonnance d'adoption a été rendue en Ontario avant le 1^{er} septembre 2008 auront l'option d'enregistrer dans leurs dossiers un veto sur la divulgation d'informations identificatoires. Quiconque choisit d'enregistrer un veto pourra fournir volontairement des renseignements sur ses antécédents personnels et médicaux afin que les personnes adoptées puissent obtenir ces informations personnelles.

After all, everybody should be able to learn about their own personal history. I'd like to quote a former colleague of ours, Ms. Marilyn Churley, who as a young mother had to give up her son for adoption. "I gave the baby up, but not because I wanted to. But there really was no other choice. As I stared at my son through the nursery window at the hospital, my last words to him were, 'I will find you some day.' Twenty-eight years later, after much searching, I did. I wanted to know that he was happy and had found a good family." She says she was haunted for the rest of her days because she never got to hold him, and that she thought about him all the time. She goes on to say that people need to know basic personal information about themselves, and they feel better just knowing the facts—just knowing the facts.

These are the realities that our proposed legislation recognizes.

Connaître la vérité, c'est ce qui est au cœur de cette législation.

It recognizes the struggle that many adopted adults and birth parents have waged for many years: a struggle to learn about their identity and their children through personal information that the rest of us simply take for granted.

This proposed legislation would put Ontario at the forefront of modern adoption information disclosure law. It respects the recent decision of the Superior Court of Justice. It respects the view of Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner. At the same time, it would safeguard the privacy of those involved in past adoptions.

1540

Pourquoi une nouvelle législation? L'Ontario a dépassé le stade où les adoptions se faisaient en secret et où l'on se gardait bien d'en informer l'enfant. Il fût un temps où nous avions des orphelinats, des asiles pour les personnes souffrant de démence et des résidences pour les filles-mères. C'était aussi l'époque où les filles-mères se faisaient dire qu'elles devaient donner leur enfant en adoption pour obéir aux valeurs d'une société qui dictait à ses membres leur conduite.

Today, many adoptions are open. Birth relatives and adoptive families know one another's identities, and birth parents often stay in touch with the children they gave up for adoption.

Depuis plusieurs années, les personnes adultes adoptées et les parents de sang demandent à avoir un plus grand accès aux ordonnances d'adoption.

Adoptees have told us that knowing about their past would give them purpose and closure to the struggle of coping with not knowing. They told us that they shouldn't be treated differently just because they were involved in an adoption.

Birth parents told us that too often they had to give up their children due to family pressure. Many simply wanted to know if their birth children are alive and well. Child welfare experts have told us for years that adoptees want to know about their origins and birth parents want to know that their children are happy and healthy in their new families.

Nous croyons que chaque individu devrait connaître son histoire personnelle, qu'il soit ou non adopté. Nous croyons que les personnes adoptées devraient avoir les mêmes droits que les personnes non adoptées, c'est-à-dire, le droit de connaître leur identité et leur histoire personnelle.

Our legislation allows for a great deal of flexibility and personal choice in terms of privacy protection. People can choose for themselves how much information they want to reveal. They can place a disclosure veto on their file so their identifying information will not be released. They can choose to place no-contact notices or contact preferences on their files.

If an adoptee, birth parent or birth relative has concerns about diagnosing or treating a severe medical illness, they can apply for a severe medical search to locate birth relatives. This was passed under previous legislation and remains in place today.

Pourquoi maintenant? Comme je disais précédemment, l'Ontario n'est plus la province qu'elle était il y a 50 ans. Les gens et les mentalités ont évolués, et nous croyons que la législation concernant l'adoption doit aussi se moderniser.

We believe that individuals who are trying to learn about their identity and personal history should be able to do so without unnecessary hardship and delay. I believe it is in everyone's best interest to move quickly on this legislation.

Alors, je demande aux membres de la Législature de s'unir à nos efforts et de soutenir ce projet de loi.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? There might be some confusion, because I see the member from London-Fanshawe getting up. In the debate this afternoon, each party will get equal time, and we'll go in strict rotation so you won't lose any time.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I did recall the minister indicating that she would be sharing her lead time with the member, and we are prepared to accept that by way of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Yes, and some days we have to have that agreement. It was redundant today. We go in strict rotation for this particular debate. If members want leave the floor to the member for London-Fanshawe, that's your decision, but I believe that if we go in rotation the member for York-Simcoe has the floor.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Normally, when I begin making remarks, I would comment on what a pleasure it is to be able to join in the debate on this particular piece of legislation. Unfortunately, I don't feel that way about the opportunity to speak today to this legislation.

I want to just set a context for our debate today. Obviously for generations people, through various cultures and so forth, have had adoption processes. People would find themselves in a position where that became the only alternative for babies and children, and the laws then always reflected the nature of the society in which those activities were being undertaken.

Clearly, through the generations, there's always been this fundamental understanding that giving babies and children comfort, stability and support that only a family can provide was an essential ingredient. Whereas, if you look back a couple of centuries ago, they were usually informal; it could be formal relations, but there were certainly adoptions within families.

By mid-last-century there was a great deal of stigma attached to women whose babies were born out of wedlock. I can remember that girls simply disappeared for a few months to visit an aunt or something like that. It's really quite shocking, by our views, to think of the way young girls found themselves in a process over which, in many cases, they had absolutely no say, no guidance, no experience, and so they found themselves then whisked away and then, when they did have their babies, the babies were whisked away.

So it's in that kind of context that I think a lot of what we look at today in this legislation is set, but why I said at the beginning that I'm not pleased about being here at this particular point is the fact that when the government introduced its first version of this bill, it broke two fundamental principles of law—not that they are unconstitutional in themselves, but they're quite simply

principles of law that legislators are frankly advised to follow. One principle is the issue of retroactivity and the other one is reverse onus.

What we saw in the first incarnation of this legislation was, of course, the fact that these individuals who had signed over babies, usually—sometimes children—did so on the principle that this was it. They had understood and signed an agreement in which there would never be any kind of opening of materials or documentation. Instead, people found themselves in the position of something that had happened to them, in some cases, 30, 40, 50 years ago; they were then placed in a position that not only destroyed the principle of retroactivity, of suddenly finding that an agreement they made was not part of the current idea of the former bill, but also that bill required them to demonstrate another break with normal procedure, and that is the question of reverse onus. So not only were they finding themselves in the position of having this contractual agreement that they had with the state being broken, but they had to in fact be prepared to go forward and explain why this would bring danger or discomfort of some kind to them.

1550

It was on those principles that we as a caucus told you that this wasn't the right way to go, that these people who had this arrangement should be treated in a more respectful way; so did the privacy commissioner, Dr. Cavoukian. I think one of the things that bothered us as legislators, and certainly Dr. Cavoukian as the privacy commissioner, was the fact that people were e-mailing and sending us telephone messages from across the province, talking about how personally threatened they felt with this principle of retroactivity suddenly being placed upon them.

I know in my case that we would have phone calls that would be made outside my office hours simply to avoid talking to anybody, to be able to just deliver a message: "Please tell my member that this is something that would be devastating to me." Then, that would come in the form of e-mails.

I remember that I met a woman in the parking lot of my office who did not want to reveal her name or where she lived, but she wanted to talk to me about how devastating this was to her. Frankly, her fear—I think that part of the problem was the fact that this was a part of the lives of so many of these affected people; that they had managed, like the proverbial oyster with the pearl, to weave a piece around it, the time in their lives that they believed would be a secret forever.

Suddenly to find themselves powerless, to be able to say, "This is going to impact on me. No one knows this about me. How am I going to be able to deal with this in the context of my family, friends and so forth?"—in my case, I hope I was able to make my constituent appreciate that I was very sympathetic to her circumstances.

I also want to say that I also understood the need to know, and I think that our role in debate was always premised on the fact that we recognized that there should be a legal opportunity for the right to know. But putting

all of these women in the situation, and I shouldn't just say women, because there were also fathers, as well as adoptees, who felt—I want to say, beyond threatened, because they weren't sure of how there could ever be some protection for them, given the legislative framework that they were looking at.

I want to take some time, because I think that for all of the members of the committee, regardless of which side of the committee you sat on—when Dr. Cavoukian came she brought with her a collection of e-mails and letters that she had received. It's important to remind everyone that this is the context for the bill that we are looking at today. So I'm going to read a couple of the letters that she received that were demonstrating what we on this side felt was so important.

I begin: "I am horrified and shocked at the adoption disclosure legislation introduced ... by the government. I am one of the young girls who thought they were safe.... When I signed the adoption papers some 35 years ago, I was promised in a courtroom that my identity would be protected and that no identifying information about me would ever be released. I feel betrayed by the system."

Another wrote, "I am most distraught that my life is going to be turned upside down, my reputation sullied, my career ruined and that my family will be in shambles if my privacy is violated by opening up adoption files.... Birth parents deserve the protection they were promised. Adoptions were confidential and there was never any reason to believe that this trust would be desecrated."

Another mother who had given up her child in the 1950s wrote, "In my case ... we birth mothers were promised complete confidentiality upon adoption.... Please consider my situation now. I am 70 years old, 40 years married.... None of my family members are aware of what happened to me when I was young. Is it fair that after 50 years I am faced with a disclosure that would shock and affect my whole family? ... I feel that my rights of privacy, which were promised by the government, are being broken with no consideration given to birth mothers or their feelings."

Another letter: "I was assured my file and identity would be sealed always. It is wrong to expect we, of 80 years of age and living in a much different era, to conform to 21st-century ideas and rules.... I do not want to relive 60 years ago. I would rather be dead. They have broken bonds of trust...."

"This legislation," another writer says, "appears to be against elderly birth mothers. We are the ones that [were] told our records would be sealed and not to interfere with the adoption...."

I think that's another point that is overlooked as well—the manner in which girls at that particular time were treated and the way in which they did not have any rights at all. The only one they had in this regard was that right to privacy.

The writer goes on: "I am over 80 years old. If they [the government] wait a few years, many of us will be dead and not a bother to the government."

Another letter says, "There should be no retroactive adoption disclosure. It should start now so everyone is aware of this. It is unfair. I was promised sealed records always. It would be taking away our privacy rights. No government should stoop so low."

I think it's important to put these back on the record, and there are letters in Hansard from fathers as well as adoptees who shared the concerns that I have suggested.

I guess the problem is that despite all of this effort that was made by members of the House and the efforts made by people who would have been adversely impacted by this legislation, all of that was in vain until the Superior Court of Ontario came into the process and then made it very clear that the judge's comments—and I'm quoting here from Mr. Sterling, also in Hansard: "It's important to read the judgment of Judge Belobaba, who made it so clear that the government of Ontario probably has the least regard for privacy rights of all governments in not only North America but the world...."

"Perhaps the greatest lesson from this particular piece of legislation is how important our Charter of Rights is. If it had not been for our Charter of Rights in Canada, we would have had a travesty in the breach of our privacy rights here ... in Ontario."

1600

I think it's very important for people to understand that the issue around developing rights for people is really, as I mentioned before, that the right to know has to be balanced with the right to privacy. The changes that this bill represents are a direct reflection then, on the efforts that were made by so many people in the community as well as those able to speak, like Dr. Cavoukian, and the judge in the Ontario Supreme Court. So I think the important thing here is to recognize that.

I guess what I could say about this bill is that it's certainly better now. It seems a shame that we have had to go through this process twice when once would have been fine, had the government listened to that kind of expert advice that it received. I think the bill, as it stands now, is certainly one that is supported by people and deserves that support. The question is, why did it take two bills when one would have done?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I appreciate the accommodation of me by my colleague the member for Beaches—East York, who is our party's critic in this issue and who will be addressing this legislation more fully in but a few minutes' time. I asked him for the opportunity to speak to this matter, albeit briefly.

I remember the history of this legislation very, very well, and I thank the numerous people from what they call the adoption community, who advocated for legislative reform and who presented very compelling narratives about the loss of identity that flows from being unable to identify one's antecedents, one's ancestry.

Like others in this chamber, my own family, my dear lovely cousin Kim is adopted and she is my age. I remember, over the course of the last 25 years, spending a whole lot of time with her doing amateur sleuthing, looking for her birth family. Of course, she was adopted

as a baby. She grew up as a part of my family. In her case, it was a delightful, wonderful experience. She found her birth mother and also a natural brother—because she has no siblings of her own—with whom she has developed a great relationship.

But I do want to acknowledge and say this—again, Michael Prue is going to be speaking more fully to the Belobaba decision and to the content of the bill—we, in this chamber, allowed the powerful and emotional appeal of persons in that adoption community to generate a zealotry on our part that then led us to overlook some of the very obvious.

Ann Cavoukian is our privacy commissioner, an officer of this assembly, a non-partisan personality, who has distinguished herself in so many ways as the commissioner of privacy here in the province of Ontario, and prior to that, as an employee of that office. Ann Cavoukian was unequivocal—absolute and oh so clear—about the fact that Bill 183's failure to include disclosure vetoes was a serious breach of the privacy rights of mothers.

You heard the member from York—Simcoe read you some of the stories that were presented to the committee through Ms. Cavoukian and others, of parents, mothers, who feared the impact of Bill 183.

One of the arguments made was, "Well, not every mother was promised confidentiality"; you'll recall that. In fact, there were people who came forward and said, "I wasn't promised confidentiality." But to go from that point to the next point and somehow argue that no mother was guaranteed confidentiality is simply absurd. In fact, when Ann Cavoukian, the privacy commissioner, appeared on May 18, 2005, before the social policy committee, she said: "You may have heard from others that no promises of confidentiality were ever made to birth parents in the past. To that, I say, nonsense." She then goes on to tell that committee, "But I assure you that all of the people whom I've heard from—and whom you're about to hear from; you're going to hear their words—were all promised confidentiality." So while there may well have been mothers who weren't promised confidentiality, there remains the fact that there were huge numbers of women who were promised confidentiality.

Ms. Cavoukian pleaded with the members of that committee and this assembly to not pass legislation that didn't contain a disclosure veto in her appearance before the committee on social policy back on May 18, 2005. In a letter dated May 16, 2005, where she documented it in writing prior to attendance before the committee, she wrote: "A disclosure veto for past adoptions is imperative to protect those who were assured that their confidentiality would be protected. To do less would be tantamount to turning your collective backs on birth parents and adopted persons who were promised privacy, regardless of the consequences."

It was only but two days after the bill was proclaimed that the Superior Court of Justice overturned those sections which permitted disclosure without veto as being contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I want to

commend lawyer Clay Ruby for his advocacy in that matter. I say to the people who are disappointed with that decision that surely the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian constitution—unless one in fact doesn't believe that it's a suitable foundation document—has got to prevail over the will or wishes, however zealous and well-intended, of legislators.

But I say this—and on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I tell you, I apologize to Ann Cavoukian; I do, unequivocally and without hesitation; she did her job, she did it well and she did it professionally—we preferred not to follow her advice. We were wrong. We were very, very wrong. We failed to display the courage that should be expected of legislators and of parliamentarians, who sometimes have to make choices which are in conflict with the will of their constituents, if those choices are in contravention of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The public has got to understand that. Our responsibility isn't just to the instant issue; it's to the long term.

I take this opportunity to again apologize, to express our regret to Ann Cavoukian, to thank her for her exceptional assistance in this particular matter, and to perhaps remind ourselves that when we have respected officers of the assembly who give us learned counsel and guidance, it would serve us and our constituents well to abide by that counsel and advice.

1610

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me a chance to stand up and speak in support of Bill 12, the Access to Adoption Records Act, 2008.

I want to echo the Minister of Community and Social Services and other members who spoke about the issue, because it's a very important issue. After 80 years of secrecy surrounding adoptions, we are finally proposing to open the records and give the majority of adults who were adopted as children the chance to learn more about themselves and their birth parents. This has been a long time coming.

The sealing of adoption records is the legacy of a different age in Ontario. In the past, the identities of adoptees and birth parents were kept hidden from each other because the prevailing attitude toward adoption dictated that adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents needed to be protected from the social stigma associated with being unmarried, poor, coping with mental illness or addiction, and other reasons that children were placed for adoption. The shame associated with getting pregnant out of wedlock forced young mothers to hand over their newborn babies to the state or religious organizations. Imagine the loss those young mothers must have felt in that moment. And they would have to carry it for the rest of their lives—permanently exiled from their children.

A birth mother needs to know what happened to the child she gave up. As one birth mother wrote, "I have never yet once in 18 years found a birth mother who did not wish to know what happened to her child.... It's a human situation."

And adoptees have many unanswered questions. Adoptees need to know, "Who am I?" It's about more

than just their genetic history. It's about feeling like they know their identity and their origins. As one adoptee wrote, "Can we truly be ourselves if we don't know where we came from? I'm almost 40 now and I still have questions about my origins. Why do I look the way I do? Where did I get my personality?"

Notre société a changé. Aujourd'hui, les gens rejettent le code du silence qui était associé à l'adoption. L'Ontario a évolué depuis l'époque où les adoptions se faisaient en secret et où l'on se gardait bien d'en informer l'enfant. Refuser aux parents de sang et aux personnes adoptées des renseignements identificatoires tels que leur nom et prénom ne fait que perpétuer le climat de honte et de secret. Les gens devraient pouvoir connaître leur histoire personnelle.

Our government has long maintained that people who are involved in adoption should have the same ability as non-adopted people to learn about their past and their family. Our overhaul of adoption disclosure laws will help most adoptees and birth parents get the information they are looking for.

At the same time, we recognize there will be some individuals who don't want others to have access to any of their personal information. Some people want control over the use of their personal information. That's why our legislation includes protections that respect the privacy of those involved in past adoptions. Adopted adults and birth parents involved in past adoptions who wish to maintain their privacy may file a disclosure veto prohibiting the release of any information from their files or file a no-contact notice prohibiting personal contact where information is disclosed. Anyone who chooses to use a disclosure veto will be able to voluntarily provide their medical history so that adoptees may be able to obtain important health information.

Going forward, people involved in future adoptions will have the option of placing a no-contact notice on their file. This means that people will get the information they need, but the law will protect them from any unwanted intrusion. They won't have to renew a connection if they don't want to. Anyone who breaches the notice could face a \$50,000 fine.

Ce système, qui est en place dans d'autres juridictions où l'on a donné accès aux dossiers, fonctionne très bien. Par contre, les personnes qui veulent être contactées peuvent enregistrer un avis du mode de communication préféré afin d'en informer un parent de sang ou une personne adoptée.

The doors would be wide open for them. They are free to make decisions about their own lives. I quote an editorial from the Toronto Star: "Adopted adults are just that—adults. We can and do make decisions about our own lives every day. Like every other adult in the province, we have a right to know who we are." April 2005, page F7.

This is good legislation. It's thoughtful and responsible. It is balanced. This bill, if passed, would give adopted adults and birth parents access to identifying information in their adoption records, information about

their personal past, information so many people have wanted for so long.

But for people who want to leave their past in the past, our proposed legislation includes a retroactive information disclosure veto for those involved in past adoptions. This means that people involved in past adoptions can choose to prevent the release of any identifying information from their records.

C'est une approche qui respecte la décision de la Cour supérieure de justice et l'opinion du commissaire à l'information et à la protection de la vie privée de l'Ontario. Ceci respecte également la vie privée d'un individu qui, pour des raisons tout à fait personnelles, désire conserver l'anonymat.

They won't have to disclose their identities. Under the proposed bill, the veto would be available for people who have their adoption records made in Ontario before September 1, 2008. Anyone who chooses to use a disclosure veto would have the option to voluntarily provide their medical history so that birth relatives may be able to obtain important health information.

It has taken years to get to this point, years to get this piece of legislation just right. I encourage all the members of this House to support this legislation. It will help us usher in a new era of progress for Ontario's adoption. Let's move forward and pass this bill.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm mindful of the time, but there are a few things that need to be said.

I stand here in support of the bill today—and I think all members in the House should support the bill—but I am also mindful of the reason that we are here. We have heard some flowery speeches and rationale, but we are here for one reason, and that is because the learned Judge Ed Belobaba in his decision made a ruling to which this Legislature must respond. The learned judge of course was right, that the Legislature had overlooked some of the aspects of the bill which we should not have overlooked. He gave us an opportunity to repair the bill so that it will meet the constitutional safeguards which we as legislators must always endeavour to obey.

I am mindful of the long period of time it has taken for this bill to get to this stage. Surely, it has occupied the greater part of the time that I have spent in this Legislature. In looking at the background to the bill, I see that the bill for adoption disclosure was first put forward by my former colleague Marilyn Churley on December 2, 1998. It was brought forward a second time in June 2000. It was brought forward a third time on June 28, 2001, and then again in May 2003, again in December 2003, and finally culminated in a government bill, Bill 183, which was passed by the Legislature in 2005.

1620

As I said, it took a long time for all of this to happen. It is a bill that's very close to my heart, because I had an opportunity on all of the occasions since my arrival here in 2001 to debate the merits of this particular bill and to stand shoulder to shoulder with my then colleague Marilyn Churley, who was from Toronto—Danforth, as she fought to have disclosure. It was wonderful working

with her. In fact, I had worked with her for many years. There was one day, unbeknownst to me that she even had a son, when I opened up the Toronto Star—I had known Marilyn Churley for some 10 years prior to that—to read that wonderful story of how she had given her son up for adoption and how she had taken all those many years to find him. It was quite a moving experience that committed me to help her and to ensure that her dream came true.

We all voted—at least in the New Democratic Party and, I believe, all members of the government Liberal Party at that occasion—for final passage in the last Parliament. We did not heed, as my colleague from Wellingland had to say, the advice of the privacy commissioner. I believe we did not heed the advice of the privacy commissioner because we wanted to have the strongest bill possible in the world in order to accommodate people finding their natural birth parents and adults finding their children who had been given up for adoption. We likened it after what had happened in Australia and some other jurisdictions and believed that Ontario could follow the same route. Unfortunately, that was not the case and Judge Belobaba told us so in his ruling.

What is happening now in this bill is simply to remedy that error which was made; nothing more, nothing less. It will continue the bill and the dream of my former colleague Marilyn Churley to make sure that people can find their families following an adoption. What it ensures now is that from this time forward, or certainly from September of this year forward, all new adoptions will be fully discloseable.

I'd just like to talk about Marilyn Churley's take on all this, because she is not here today. I was with Marilyn Churley on the day that the decision was to be rendered. She was knocking on doors with me. It was during the last provincial election. She was trying to help me in the riding of Beaches—East York. We were knocking on doors, and she told me that she had to go that afternoon because she had to go down to the courthouse to hear the decision. She was a little worried about what that decision might be, but she was bound and determined that she was going to be there with the members of the adoption community, that she was going to be there to hear first-hand what the ruling was going to state and that she was going to make herself available to the press to comment, no matter what had happened. I did not see her for the balance of that day, but I did see her the next day when she had come back. Of course, she was sad, of course she was upset and of course she wished that the ruling had gone the other way. But she told me forthrightly on that day, and I convey that to the Legislature at this time, that she believed that we had to comply with the ruling of the learned judge. She believed that there was no alternative, save and except what had been put forward, and that the rights of individuals who had been promised anonymity had to be respected. She asked me, if we had an opportunity and this bill came back before the House, to support the bill. She asked me, in supporting the bill, to ensure that the rights and privileges

of those people who had given their children up for adoption in the past and wished anonymity would be respected. But she also asked, and I think the bill conveys this, that all future cases would be free from that provision.

I think Marilyn would be happy to be here in the Legislature today, and I know that if she were here in the Legislature she would be supporting this bill. She believes in the rights of individuals; she has fought her whole life for those rights. She believes in the rights of adoptees and of those who adopted them. We really have no alternative, given the decision, but to follow Judge Belobaba's recommendations, and I believe that this legislation does precisely that.

I am heartened by the fact that the right to register a disclosure veto is, from this point on, only possible for adoption orders that are made before September 1, 2008, and, thereafter, every adoption order made will be freely accessible to all parties. I am also heartened that there is a provision that will allow for the—disclosure seekers would be asked to voluntarily provide medical history so that in the event that a life-threatening illness happens to someone, they will be able to go back and trace the history, although it may be anonymously, because that was an important provision of what we discussed when Bill 183 was passed into law.

I think that is about all I need to say on this bill. I do encourage members on all sides of the House to support it. I am mindful that when it was before the House

previously, many members in the Conservative Party chose not to, but I believe, in retrospect, that was for a very good reason: because most of them, when they spoke against the bill, spoke about the privacy provisions. Now that they have been remedied by this bill, I believe that all members of this Legislature should move forward, pass the bill and do what is right and what Marilyn Churley fought for so many years in this House to accomplish.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member from Beaches–East York for his contributions to the debate. Further debate?

There being no further debate, Madame Meilleur has moved second reading of Bill 12. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Monsieur le Président, I would ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, April 7, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1627.

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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (L)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	

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Pendergast, Leeanna (L)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
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Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader of the Official Opposition, Opposition House leader / Chef de l'opposition officielle, leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
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Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
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Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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