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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 7 October 2008

Mardi 7 octobre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 7 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 7 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask members to join me in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: I made reference to the motion that was passed by the majority of this House, notwithstanding the opposition of the two opposition parties, in particular, the time allocation portion of that motion. It was a motion called for the first time on April 21, as I recall. It speaks of a "government substantive motion"—and I agree that what we have here is a substantive motion—"to extend or permanently adopt"—and this is a motion to permanently adopt—"the provisional standing orders." It's what I refer to colloquially as a ratification of the provisional standing orders, and that would be fine if it were left at that. However, this isn't a bare motion to merely ratify the provisional standing orders that were passed by the government on May 1, as I recall it. This also includes extensive additions to those provisional orders that were passed on May 1.

The issue here is the one-hour time allocation, and in particular the interesting language of the motion that this House's majority passed on May 1: The "government substantive motion" ... "and any amendments thereto, shall be called for debate.... The debate on such motion shall be limited to one hour...."

Now, this is what's of concern to me: There are two interpretations, in my respectful submission to you, of that language. One is—and I expect that this is the government's argument—that it's the motion, and that "any amendments thereto" refers to amendments to the standing orders.

I suggest to you that this language is equivocal: "any amendments thereto," I submit to you, could as readily be understood as amendments to the substantive motion. And if that were the case, this motion, which is far more than a ratification motion; which is a motion that goes far beyond merely saying we adopt the provisional orders provided for in the motion that was passed on May 1, I submit then that the language is such that it could equally

as readily be interpreted as being "amendments thereto" is restricted to one hour. We don't have amendments to the motion; we have amendments to the standing order.

I say to you that the language permits an interpretation that it says "amendments to the motion," but there are no amendments to the motion. You can't move amendments until after the motion is moved, and therefore this motion, being far more than a mere ratification motion, is not subject to the one-hour time limit.

I hope I have been clear. And I state further that if there is an equivocal interpretation, the interpretation that's most generous is the one that ought to be applicable, and that is the one, of course, that doesn't include the very onerous one-hour time allocation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to thank the honourable member from Welland for his motion. He certainly has raised some points that are worthy of consideration of me as Speaker.

I would like the opportunity to consult with the table on the points that have been raised. I'm going to call a 10-minute recess to have the opportunity to take that under advisement, consult with the table, and respond to the honourable member.

This House is in recess for 10 minutes.

The House recessed from 0907 to 0929.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I need to deal with and reply to the other point of order first, please. Thanks.

I want to thank the member from Welland for his point of order. The relevant part of the motion at issue reads as follows:

"Any government substantive motion to extend or permanently adopt the provisional standing orders, and any amendments thereto, shall be called to debate no later than the third Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008. The debate on such motion shall be limited to one hour, to be apportioned equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion." I agree with the member from Welland that there are two ways to interpret the motion, depending on how one takes the meaning of the phrase "and any amendments thereto."

On one interpretation, the one-hour debate is allotted to a motion to either adopt or extend the provisional standing orders. Such a motion would be a substantive government motion, but it would also be fully subject to amendment. Therefore, an amendment from the floor

during debate on a motion for extension or adoption which would propose to further amend the provisional standing orders along the lines proposed by the government House leader would be in order. A second interpretation is that one hour is allotted to debate on a motion to adopt or extend the provisional standing orders and any further amendments to them. This is the interpretation underlying the form of the motion the government House leader has put before the House.

In my view, it is fortunate for the House that, in effect, either interpretation essentially takes us to the same place, because neither way of proceeding represents an advantage or disadvantage to any side of the House, and in any event amounts to the same thing in this circumstance, albeit by slightly different procedural means. I find the motion to be in order and to be consistent with the order of the House of May 1, 2008, and with the process it set forth in dealing with our standing orders.

Moreover, a distinct benefit to the House of dealing with all of these amendments as a government notice of motion is that the entire proposal is on the order paper and has been given one day's notice. The alternative would have been for all of the proposed further amendments to be moved spontaneously from the floor during debate. Though this would have been in order, it would not have afforded all members the opportunity to prepare for today's debate.

I thank the member from Welland. The Minister of Government Services on a point of order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You took the words of my point of order right out of my mouth, so it's now redundant. I thank you for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? Move the motion, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I move that the standing orders, as amended on May 1, 2008, be further amended as follows and adopted as the permanent standing orders of the House; and

That the permanent standing orders come into force at 12:01 a.m. on the Friday of the week that they are adopted by the House, except standing order 6(a) which shall come into force at 12:01 a.m. on January 1, 2009. Standing order 6(a) as it existed immediately prior to the coming into force of the permanent standing orders shall remain in effect until 12:01 a.m. on January 1, 2009.

That the definition of "routine motion" in standing order 2 be amended by striking out "9" in the second line and substituting "6."

That standing order 6(a) be struck out and the following substituted:

"6(a) During a Parliament, the House shall meet:

"(i) from the third Tuesday in February to the first Thursday in June; and

"(ii) from the Monday following Labour Day to the second Thursday in December.

"During these meeting periods, the House shall not meet during the following constituency weeks:

"1. The week prescribed by the regulations made under the Education Act for the school holiday in March;

"2. The week in which Easter Monday falls;

"3. The week in which Victoria Day falls;

"4. The week in which Thanksgiving Day falls;

"5. The week in which Remembrance Day falls, except that if Remembrance Day falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, the House shall instead not meet the week preceding Remembrance Day."

That clauses (a) and (b) of standing order 8 be struck out and the following substituted:

"8(a) the weekly meeting schedule of the House, when it is in session, shall be"—

Mr. Peter Kormos: "For the House."

Hon. Ted McMeekin: "For the House." I thank the eagle-eyed member opposite for that.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Only one eye working.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: There you go. Better than most of us with two over here. Thank you.

"8.(a) The weekly meeting schedule for the House when it is in session shall be:

Day	Time	Proceeding
Monday	10:30 a.m.	Introduction of visitors
	10:35 a.m.	Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Deferred votes
	Following deferred votes	Recess
	1 p.m.	Introduction of visitors
	1:05 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

“ Tuesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day			Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Petitions
	10:15 a.m.	Recess			
	10:30 a.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	10:35 a.m.	Oral questions			
	Following oral questions	Deferred votes			
	Following deferred votes	Recess			
	3 p.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	3:05 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Petitions			
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day			
6 p.m.	Adjournment	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day		
		6 p.m.	Adjournment		
“ Wednesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day			Orders of the day Recess Introduction of visitors Oral questions Deferred votes Recess Introduction of visitors Routine proceedings: Members' statements
	10:15 a.m.	Recess			
	10:30 a.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	10:35 a.m.	Oral questions			
	Following oral questions	Deferred votes			
	Following deferred votes	Recess			
	3 p.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	3:05 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements			
“ Thursday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day			Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Petitions
	10:15 a.m.	Recess			
	10:30 a.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	10:35 a.m.	Oral questions			
	Following oral questions	Deferred votes			
	Following deferred votes	Recess			
	1 p.m.	Introduction of visitors			
	1:05 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Petitions			
		Following private members' public business	Orders of the day		
		6 p.m.	Adjournment		

“(b) The bells shall be rung for five minutes before the time appointed for the meeting of the House, and at 10:25 a.m. every day, to summon the members, and otherwise at the discretion of the Speaker.”

That standing order 8 be amended by adding the following new clauses:

“(c.1) During any morning that the House meets, when the Speaker calls “orders of the day” the government House Leader may indicate that no business, or no further business, as the case may be, is to be called that morning, whereupon the Speaker shall without motion immediately recess the House until 10:30 a.m.

“(c.2) No later than 3:15 p.m. on any Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday that the House meets, the government House leader may indicate that no business is to be called during orders of the day on the next day’s morning meeting, and in such case the House shall meet at 10:30 a.m. on that next day.

0940

That clause (d) of standing order 8 be amended by striking out the words “during the week prescribed by the regulations made under the Education Act for the school holiday in March” in the first, second and third lines and substituting “on the day on which there is a general election of members to serve in the Canadian House of Commons”.

That standing order 9(b) be struck out.

That clause (d) of standing order 9 be amended by striking out the word “routine” in the fourth line.

That clause (h) of standing order 28 be amended by striking out the word “routine” in the sixth line.

That clause (a) of standing order 30 be amended by striking out “deferred votes” and substituting “petitions”.

That clause (b) of standing order 30 be amended by striking out “petitions” and substituting “deferred votes”.

That clause (c) of standing order 30 be amended by striking out “and any deferred votes,” in the fifth line.

That clause (c) of standing order 32 be amended by striking out “notwithstanding standing order 46(a)” in the fourth and fifth lines.

That standing order 36 be struck out and the following substituted:

“36. Up to five minutes shall be allotted, immediately preceding ‘oral questions’ and again immediately upon the resumption of the House in an afternoon meeting, for members to recognize guests.”

That clause (a) of standing order 38 be amended by striking out “4:30 p.m.” and “5:00 p.m.” in the ninth line and substituting “noon” and “4:00 p.m.”, respectively.

That clause (b) of standing order 38 be amended by striking out “5:45 p.m.” in the second line and substituting “6:00 p.m.”, and by adding at the end of the clause “or, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(i) or (ii), to 6:45 p.m., as the case may be.”

That clause (e) of standing order 38 be amended by striking out “5:45” and substituting “6:00”.

That clause (b) of standing order 39 be amended by adding the word “routine” before the word “proceeding” in the second line.

That clause (c) of standing order 43 be amended by striking out “5:35” in the second line and substituting “5:50”.

That clause (b) of standing order 44 be amended by striking out “5:35” in the fifth line and substituting “5:50”.

That standing order 46(a) be amended by adding the following sentence:

“If at 10:15 a.m. on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday the division bells are ringing for a vote on a motion to adjourn the debate, the Speaker shall interrupt the bell, conduct the division and then immediately recess the House pursuant to standing order 8(a).”

That clause (b) of standing order 58 be struck out and the following substituted:

“(b) On the day designated for the presentation of the budget, the Speaker shall recess the House immediately following routine proceedings until 4:00 p.m., except that if routine proceedings have not been completed by 4:00 p.m., the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the routine proceeding currently occupying the House and immediately call orders of the day.”

That the following new standing order be added:

“68.1(a) private members’ public bills may be co-sponsored by up to one member from each of the recognized parties, and by any independent member. It shall be the responsibility of the co-sponsors to select which among them will move the motion for introduction and first reading of the bill. Any of the co-sponsors shall be entitled to move the motions for second or third reading of the bill. The names of the co-sponsors shall be indicated on the introduction copy of the bill and shall thereafter be printed on the face of the bill.

“(b) Any one of the co-sponsors of such a bill may designate the bill as his or her item of business for private members’ public business, and any or all of the co-sponsors may speak during the time allotted by standing order 97(a)(i). The member designating the bill for the purposes of private members’ public business shall have charge of the bill in any committee.

“(c) A co-sponsor may withdraw as a sponsor of the bill at any time by providing written notice to the Clerk of the House. His or her name shall be removed from the bill entry on the orders and notices paper, and shall be removed from the face of the bill at any subsequent reprinting of the bill.”

That clause (e) of standing order 125 be deleted and the following substituted:

“(e) There shall be not less than three hours of debate in the House on such a bill, to take place at a time or times allotted by agreement of the House leaders of the recognized parties.”

That the Clerk of the House be authorized and instructed to print a revised edition of the standing orders of the House, renumbering and making such technical and consequential changes as may be deemed necessary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. McMeekin has moved government notice of motion

number 86. I will now ask for debate. I recognize the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that I've had my share of time on this already, so I'll be sharing my time with the members for Huron–Bruce and London–Fanshawe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise today, and I will be supporting the recommendations going forward on the reform. I wanted to give a bit more detail for those who are listening to us and the debate that will be coming.

Specifically, there are 10 recommendations. From the Liberal apportionment of the committee, these are the recommendations. We also have dissenting reports from the official opposition as well as the third party, but the majority obviously carried the list of the recommendations. I wanted to lay that out. That's the foundation; that's what we ended with and now are debating in the House.

The first recommendation is that question period be scheduled at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Certainly from the dissenting reports, there has been a great deal of discussion about question period, the time allocation. I wanted to specifically read into the record comments that were made by Dr. Nelson Wiseman. Dr. Wiseman is a professor at the University of Toronto and has been there since 1980. I feel that his comments were certainly on point. To quote:

“More important than the time of question period is how many question periods are held. On that score I note, according to your debate, that Ontario had more sitting days last year than any other Canadian Legislature. Ontario also devotes more time to question period than other Canadian Legislatures, and there's been no proposal to shorten it.” That is not part of the recommendation. That's one quote.

A second quote from the same professor:

“The changes to the standing orders mean reorganized schedules for members and the media. I predict that in coming years, if a government proposes to revert to afternoon question periods or to reschedule the time for private members' bills and to reduce time for their debate or to reinstitute evening sessions, such proposals will be vigorously opposed also as an assault on democracy. The provisional changes in the standing orders, in my opinion, are no such threat.”

0950

Another comment—and I've lost my pages here now. But one of the things that I wanted to reinforce was that this is a man who has reviewed over the years—for many, many decades. We have heard from him. It's not just the member speaking; it's also Dr. Wiseman speaking. Those recommendations, I believe, are quite pertinent and it will certainly be interesting to see, in time, if in fact he is correct. I think that he is, and there will be a great deal of protest coming the other way. So that's the first point on question period.

The second recommendation is that deferred votes be scheduled immediately following question period and the petitions be scheduled during routine proceedings. This is certainly something that came up in the discussions. This was to give a point in time for deferred votes. A concern was raised by the media, specifically, so that there was a better understanding from all sides about the schedules, how it would go forward and expectations. By scheduling deferred votes following question period, that speaks to the media's concerns and it also speaks to allowing the members better ability to schedule their day as well and to get to the votes. The people of Ontario want to know, and that's why the media raised the concern, so that all members would be held accountable—transparency—and so they know when the votes are being held.

The third recommendation is that question period be preceded by a five-minute bell. This is certainly something that the member of the official opposition brought forward and we are bringing that forward as a recommendation. We feel that it's important. It's the same as the second recommendation: It's about giving the members the ability to have full comprehension of their schedule and for it to flow much easier. By allowing the members the five-minute bell, it gives a point in time for question period to begin. It also gives a point in time when the debate ends and it goes forward. This was also a concern that was raised by the media, so that they knew when question period would begin. So it's a set time.

The fourth recommendation: that the legislative calendar, beginning in February, be adjusted to reflect four weeks on and one week off. So I say to you, Mr. Speaker, since there is no comment on that recommendation in the dissenting reports from either the official opposition or the third party, we can only assume that must be a recommendation that they're very supportive of.

One of the things that we all know as members is such a juggle is our constituency work as well as our legislative responsibilities. This gives us more time in our constituency offices and the ability to go out and meet with our people on a regular basis. We know, from the parliamentary calendar being laid out, when we will be back in our ridings, and it gives us greater flexibility to meet with our constituents. It also addresses the concern raised from our employees within the Legislative Assembly, on their allocation of time and how they deal with the bulk of the work through the Legislative Assembly. It also gives them the opportunity—and I will use this language—to catch up while we are back doing our work with our constituents. I must say that this is something that certainly has been supported. It also reflects much of how Ottawa works as well. It really has been very well received.

Point number five: that the House commence sitting each Monday morning at 10:30 a.m., followed by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning. This is one of the things that came up in the hearings from our expert witnesses. There was a concern raised that it was very difficult for the set-up and to get the information and technology ready for that early on Monday morning

at 9 o'clock. The recommendation coming forward is reflective of that, so the proceedings will begin at 10:30 on Monday to reflect the ability for the staff to get set up for us.

Recommendation number 6 is that routine proceedings be at 1 p.m. on Monday and Thursday, and 3 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday. The Monday and Thursday times are different because caucus and cabinet meet on Tuesday and Wednesday. That's the 3 o'clock time, and the 1 o'clock time is for Monday and Thursday. This gives us the ability to have more debate time in the House, and that's what these standing order reforms do: They give us the ability to have more debate time and to also be respectful of caucus time, as well as cabinet time.

Recommendation number 7: that the House should consider reviewing the use of e-petitions. This is something that the committee was just not prepared to move forward with. They felt that it was important that we give it further consideration. I felt, generally, as a member of that committee, that there was support, but we wanted to ensure that we had the information pertinent for the e-petitions, so that was sent back for further review.

The eighth recommendation is that the introduction of guests occur twice per day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The duration of that will be five minutes and the introductions will be done by the members; they will have the ability to introduce their guests. The reason this has come up repeatedly is that if we have a guest in the House, we are so pleased when people take the time to come into the House and to listen to the debate and to be interested in their Legislative Assembly. So we really do, as members, want to take—it's an honour and a privilege for us to be able to introduce our guests, as I'm going to introduce some guests just right now. They're from the riding of Huron–Bruce. That's all I'm going to say. It's for our young page. Welcome.

The ninth recommendation is that private members' business be conducted on Thursday afternoon, with three private members' bills or resolutions debated each day. In the past, as you know, we had two private members' bills. This gives us the ability to move three private members' bills forward. It changed; in the past, it was in the morning, and this is changing it to the afternoon.

We recognize that there is much more work to do with private members' bills, and we certainly stated that in committee. But the emphasis for the private members' bills coming forward—increasing the number—also gives all of us the ability to bring bills and motions forward that are important to the people of Ontario and important to our constituents within our ridings, and we felt it was important to increase that. But I do want to get on the record that we do recognize that there is much more work to do.

I'm now going to go to the 10th recommendation: that private members' bills can be sponsored by more than one member and by members of different parties. Since these came forward, we also have an independent member, and I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the independent member, who is, of course, my neighbour,

Bill Murdoch. I just wanted to say how important it is that we all represent—we all work very hard and we recognize that it's an honour and a privilege to represent the people of Ontario, and what we can do to move that forward, I believe, is very important. Co-sponsoring bills is one way that we can ensure that the importance of private members' business is reflected by all parties—and often it is. As I say to my constituents, if you want to listen to debate when the members are talking about what their thoughts are and they have a longer period of time to talk, and it's more a debate that we're used to, you come to private members' business.

1000

I can tell you that as a new member, when I first arrived at the House here in 2003, I was very impressed with the level of debate in private members' business, and the ability to co-sponsor bills, I believe, will strengthen and move bills forward faster.

I do not want to take any more time, as the member for London–Fanshawe, I know, is anxious to get up and speak. This is reform that, in my opinion, is certainly overdue. Reflecting how the business is conducted in Ontario, reflecting it in this House, is important. I'm always in favour of more debate time and more private members' business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? Member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order: She indicated that the other Liberal members are going to share their time. Please, Ms. MacLeod, Mr. Ramal wants the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): No, that's not the way it works on a motion like this. We actually go in rotation, notwithstanding the fact that she indicated who the other government speakers were going to be.

Member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Government Services mentioned, when he was speaking, that he was going to share the time with the member from Huron and myself.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I say to the member for London–Fanshawe, you will get your chance to speak if you are in the House when the rotation comes around and it's your party's turn.

I recognize the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, I hope that we will get more time on the clock. I've just lost one minute.

I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Huron–Bruce. I'd like to split my time with the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

The member for Huron–Bruce talked about real reform. This is not real reform—they've not reformed parliamentary democracy—or parliamentary reform at all. In fact, their legacy on parliamentary reform is tinkering with our trillium, tinkering with the Lord's Prayer and

now tinkering with our question period. This has nothing to do with making Queen's Park more family-friendly. It has everything to do with penalizing the opposition. It is the rules in democracy that protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority, yet in these specific standing orders changes we have once again seen this Liberal government strong-arm the opposition into changes in our daily routine that will not produce any more debate. In fact, we've seen debate die in this chamber. We've gone to more recesses, as we've done today, and we have not been as effective in this chamber as we could have been.

I'd like to talk a little bit about this Liberal report, because it is worth noting that not only the Conservatives but also the New Democrats provided dissenting opinions on this Liberal family-friendly report. It suggests, "Before reviewing the standing orders, it is useful to review the chronology of significant events that preceded the 2008 provisional standing order changes." It says, in the first bullet, "On December 11, 2007, the House ordered 'that the House leaders of the recognized parties shall agree to terms, and an all-party panel composed of no more than two members from each recognized party shall be appointed to make recommendations to the Speaker on ways to make working at the Ontario Legislature more family-friendly for'" MPPs.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I raised this issue five times in this chamber. In fact, not only did I raise it in the chamber but I've written several times to the government House leader asking when those committee hearings or those panel hearings would actually be called. December 11, 2007, and here we are today, in October 2008, and that panel has not yet met, despite an all-party commitment to do so. I rose five times in the Legislature, on December 6 and 13, April 8, 16 and 17. I also wrote to the House leader on January 25 and April 7 requesting that the panel be struck. The last time I wrote to the government House leader—and I've still not seen a response—was on Monday, July 21. We then began hearings here on the legislative changes, which my colleague will get into in full detail later on. But there was only one thing that we all agreed on in that committee, and that was that we should have a five-minute bell before question period. I'm very shocked that the Liberals would want to, under the guise of making Queen's Park more family-friendly, take our daily proceedings to what it has become today, which is nothing more than a daily mish-mash of chaos, one that breaks routine proceedings, one that breaks debate, one that has seen debate die in the chamber because the government is unwilling to put forward meaningful legislation.

So here we are today. On December 11, 2007, we made a commitment to make this Legislature more family-friendly. Instead of making the Legislature more family-friendly and looking at this institution as a whole in terms of parliamentary democracy, the Liberal government has decided that it would tinker with the rules in this place to make them look better so that they can control what goes on in this chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity. I want to let the Liberals know that I will not be support-

ing their heavy-handedness in this chamber, nor will I ever support it in their committee. I will look forward to listening not only to my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo but also to my colleague from Welland, who I know will bring so many concerns to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I regret this day as much as I did back on May 1, and, preceding that, April 21 of this year, when the provisional orders were first called, with the vote on May 1, and now today.

Look, I've been around here a little bit—not as long as Jim Bradley, not as long as Norm Sterling, but I've been around here a little bit. I have had occasion to decry and bemoan the government's rewriting of standing orders, whether it was David Peterson and the Liberals—you recall that, colleagues—and then again the Liberals' best friend, Bob Rae, and his tinkering with the standing orders, and then the Conservatives, the so-called Baird amendments. Majority governments, each and every one of them, huge majorities, disdainful of the opposition, just as this government is.

I don't relish today's motion or today's debate or the inevitable vote, time-allocated. The government used its majority to ensure that there would be but one hour to discuss these permanent changes to the standing orders. I want you to understand that, in an effort to ensure there would still be some room for reflection and—dare I say it?—common sense, knowing full well this government's capacity as a majority government to impose even the most undemocratic measures on this chamber, New Democrats very clearly offered to let these provisional standing orders remain as but provisional standing orders. Because you know as well as I do that once they become permanent—and that's what this motion is about—there's no turning back, is there? Never will there be any turning back.

There will be subsequent governments, and they won't be Liberal governments, and some of these Liberal members will be sitting in opposition. Some of them will. As sure as God made little apples, some of these Liberal members will be sitting—how many, it's not for me to say. But sure as God made little apples, some of these Liberal members will be sitting in opposition, and then they'll be fretting and moaning about how unfair the standing orders are to the opposition. It's not just a matter of convenience. The opposition role is a very important role in a parliamentary democracy. You, above all, above any other, understand that. Good government is as much about good opposition as it is anything else, isn't it, Speaker?

1010

The opposition has a very important job to do. One of them is to hold the government's feet to the fire, and one of the tools is question period, and the vehicle to communicate question period out there to the general public is the media. The media—the fourth and fifth estates—are the eyes and the ears of 13 million Ontarians. Don't

think for a minute that moving question period now even further down into the morning doesn't have design to it on the part of the Liberal government. Its purpose is to bury question period as far down on the agenda as possible and, quite frankly, to make this place irrelevant after 11:30. Hell's bells, if you come here on a Wednesday afternoon or a Tuesday afternoon, when you've got those big gaps in the middle of the day, the government's hard-pressed to keep enough people to here maintain quorum, aren't they?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Look at the crowd you've got.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You know full well what I'm talking about.

This government, Mr. McGuinty and his Liberals, are trivializing Parliament. That causes me great concern. Oh, not so much for myself. Heck, in 20 years' time I'm not going to be here. Make no mistake about it; in 20 years' time, I'm not going to be here. Mr. Hillier may well be here, Billy Murdoch will be here. Hell, Billy Murdoch may be leader of the Conservative Party long before 20 years, let me tell you that. There's more than a modest likelihood of that happening.

But I'm more interested in the crisis this creates for young parliamentarians, for newly elected members. I've been blessed. I've been incredibly fortunate. I tell you, being elected here in 1988, I came here, I suspect, in the best of times and have witnessed the worst of things. I came here when this place was a much more lively forum for legitimate debate and exchange, where the debate was as aggressive as anybody could imagine but where the level of civility was still much higher than it has been ever since—and I suspect Mrs. Witmer may well agree with me, if she's given the opportunity—when the relevance of the discussion was significant and when question period was truly a vehicle, a means, a process whereby the public had their say.

These are frightening times. We've got an economy that's going to hell in a handbasket real fast. Almost a quarter of a million workers already lost their jobs, and a quarter million to come. And finally, you've got a finance minister who might concede a shortfall in revenues, but you've got global economic leaders who are talking about global depression. Never has Parliament been more important, more relevant, and never has it been more shameful for a government like this government to trivialize, diminish, undermine, gut the role of Parliament.

Over my couple of decades here, I've seen the increasing transfers of power into the Premier's office, and it's not been a pleasant sight, and I've bemoaned each and every turn on the way. But we've never seen more power isolated and restricted to the Premier's office than we've witnessed today. It's not a matter of backbenchers not having any power; it's a matter of cabinet ministers not having any power. It's a matter of unelected people making political decisions about the future of this province, and that's not democracy, is it? That's not democracy.

I found it quite peculiar, but nonetheless revealing, that this morning, when the Premier was confronted by the press, the media, the newspaper and television and radio journalists, one Lee Greenberg, Queen's Park press gallery member, put to the Premier, "Premier, why are you suspending the House for election day? The NDP says you're doing it to free up political staff to get out to vote." Oh, and let's understand that this motion also contains a new holiday for MPPs. This motion contains yet another holiday for MPPs—not for workers, not for the civil service, not for legislative staff, but a new holiday for MPPs. This motion contains a provision that this provincial Parliament shall not sit on the day on which there is a general election of members to serve in the Canadian House of Commons.

Oh, I hear some heckling from across the way about, "Oh, so we can go home to vote?" You've never heard of advance polls, never heard of going to the district returning office and voting any time you want prior to the election? Working people, the ones who are still fortunate enough to be working, you know, the women and men who start work at 5:30 and 6 in the morning—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Hyperbole.

Mr. Peter Kormos: "Hyperbole," the member says. Now Hansard has it. Hyperbole? That's how out of touch the Liberals are. The suggestion is that somehow it's not true that working women and men start working at 5:30 or 6 in the morning—out of touch, no contact with reality whatsoever. I think it's downright pathological—it could warrant medical intervention—to be that out of touch with reality, for the Liberal government to suggest that somehow it's hyperbolic—an interesting use of the word, isn't it?—to talk about workers starting work at 5:30 and 6 in the morning.

I don't know about where you come from, Speaker, but where I come from, hard-working women and men, the ones still fortunate enough to have jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, wake up at 4 and 4:30 so they can get to work by 5:30. And they're out there in the blistery, blustery, cold, bitter winter January and February days, laying brick and pouring concrete and building things. If you're the single mom from Thorold or Port Colborne or Welland or Wainfleet, you're at that hotel in Niagara Falls, cleaning other people's messes as you clean hotel rooms for \$10 an hour. Then you start your second job at 3 in the afternoon at the 7-Eleven, because that's what it takes, again for \$9 an hour now, to put food on the table for your kids.

Oh, politicians moan and groan, "Oh, we work so hard. Oh, politicians work so hard." There's nary a blister to be seen in this joint, is there? The most frequent injury is a paper cut or the occasional bruised ego. Work hard? I'll tell you who works hard. People who work hard are like folks down where I come from. They're folks who work and earn far, far less than what MPPs are paid.

This motion creates a holiday, a special holiday, for what the government obviously sees as very special people—MPPs. You don't have to come to work on federal election days. Why, once again, isn't it strange

that somehow 107 MPPs can't go to advance polls, that somehow 107 MPPs can't go to the returning office and vote in the perpetual advance poll that's in every returning office across the province? You see, down where I come from, like most places in Ontario, indeed all of Ontario, on election day, those folks fortunate enough to work are going to go to work in the morning—and it's usually both spouses when you've got a two-spouse family. They're going to come home tired in the evening, in the dark, and they're going to make supper and then they're going to scramble to get to the poll to vote. That's how they do it. But no, that's not good enough for MPPs, is it?

1020

So you see, it's passing strange that when Mr. McGuinty is confronted with this, this morning, by Lee Greenberg, who says, "Premier, why are you suspending the House for election day? The NDP says that you're doing it to free up political staff to get out the vote"—indeed, the NDP did say that; I said that—the Premier replies, "That's an interesting theory." Listen to this, please. The Premier replies, "That's an interesting theory, but actually there is agreement that the provincial Legislature should not sit on federal election days." Somehow the Premier is so out of touch with reality or so disconnected or in fact has been told that there's agreement—there's no agreement. Horse feathers, absolute horse feathers. The fact that there's no agreement is because New Democrats wouldn't agree to that, because they said, "No, there's important public business to be dealt with." But the reason that New Democrats wouldn't agree is why it's in the motion. It's absolutely untrue to suggest that there's a precedent, because while there have been a couple of times in the far past when there was agreement in the House not to sit on federal election days, in the most recent federal elections where the House was sitting, the House sat.

So I find it strange that the Premier would somehow think that there's an agreement. Far be it from me to suggest that he's not telling the truth. I wouldn't do that. I will not accuse the Premier of lying about that; I won't. I will not accuse the Premier of lying when he told Lee Greenberg that there's an agreement about not sitting on October 14. Far be from me to accuse the Premier of lying; I simply won't do it. One Robert Benzie of the Toronto Star then says to the Premier, "But you sat in the last two." Answer from the Premier: "Yeah, but we're going to change that." And can I insert a little editorial here?—"and a whole lot of other things too." Murray Campbell, Globe and Mail, to the Premier: "Why? Agreement among whom?" Answer: "Ah, the ah, the parties."

No agreement—government brute force is using its majority to impose its will when it has no regard for process. I like the Government House leader. I like him. I have a great deal of affection for him. I have a great deal of regard for him, but I have sympathy for him because he's the House leader in name only. The House leader's office doesn't call the shots for the government. Caucus

doesn't call the shots. The Premier's office does. It's frustrating as all get-out and more than a little bit embarrassing for the government House leader, and for us. I don't want to speak for Ms. Witmer, but I think we share his embarrassment from time to time. He's got to go scurrying off to the minions in the Premier's office to check out a particular proposal, whether or not it's going to be agreeable, before he can say or do anything about it.

MPPs give themselves election day off—that's what this motion does. That's what this motion does. Unbelievable. Do you realize how working folks are going to respond to that? Yet another holiday for MPPs in the province of Ontario. Those hard-working MPPs will have hands as soft as babies' bottoms.

Before I exhaust the mere 20 minutes that's available to me, there's a revolutionary initiative on the part of the government to restore announcing of guests to the member himself or herself. Look, far be it from me to oppose that. I suppose it's the highlight of some of the backbenchers' careers, amongst the Liberal benches, to be able to announce somebody from their community. But if that's your only access to Hansard, then by all means, do it. I, for one, will continue to use the Speaker, and the Speaker has made it clear that he will be available to introduce guests when guests are present here in the chamber. I have no objection to guests being acknowledged; of course they should be. It boggles the mind that it's the highlight of the political careers of Liberal backbenchers to be able to get two lines in Hansard, announcing John and Wanda from Hometown, Ontario. God bless John and Wanda. I'm glad they came to Queen's Park. You're welcome any time. But down where I come from, folks expect me to be talking about their jobs, their children's education, public health care and public safety. Did I mention New Democrats aren't supporting this motion? Perhaps I should make that very clear; I didn't want to be equivocal at all about our position in this matter. I regret this. I may well have the opportunity, but I'm not the sort of person—ask my colleagues—who says, "I told you so."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's right.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ask my NDP colleagues whether I've ever had occasion to say, "I told you so," to them.

Mr. Paul Miller: Never.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm not that kind of person, but I suspect that I may well, if so blessed with the opportunity to be here an election from now, have the opportunity to say to some Liberals, "I told you so." It's a shameful day, a regrettable day, a sad day; it's not a day to be proud of at all. It's not a good day for democracy and not a good day for Ontario's Parliament. Thank you kindly, Speaker, for your patience with me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the deputy leader of the official opposition.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join my colleague who spoke earlier on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus regarding the change to the standing orders. As my

colleague has already pointed out, we actually were quite shocked at some of the decisions that have been made as far as changes to the standing orders are concerned and, also, the manner in which the standing orders were introduced.

As my colleague the member for Nepean–Carleton has pointed out, there was an agreement that the parties would meet and take a look at how they could make this Legislature more family-friendly for all members of the provincial Parliament. Regrettably, that committee never did meet. There was no prior discussion about making any changes to the standing orders. In fact, the first time that we in the Progressive Conservative caucus became aware of the changes was when the media received a copy of those changes before we did and the calls started coming in and the media were looking for our response. I would say in that way, I agree with the member for Welland. The government did certainly, in that particular case, demonstrate their disdain for the opposition in the fact that they were going to be imposing standing orders in this House with little opportunity for real debate, real consultation and any attempt at consensus-making. That brings us to today.

We have a report and recommendations before us. I can say to you, despite the fact that there were public hearings and despite the fact that we had little in the way of any expert witness coming forward, there was only one thing that the opposition agreed with the government on, and that is the fact that there's a need for a five-minute bell before the start of question period, which currently is at 10:45, but which is going to be moved to an earlier time.

We do take exception to some of the comments that were made this morning by the member from Huron–Bruce, where she said that it appears that all people agree. The reality is, we don't agree, we do have a dissenting opinion, and we won't be supporting the motion.

1030

I just want to give a few initial thoughts about the report that was submitted by the Liberal government. As I say, the only thing that there was agreement on was the fact that there would be the five minutes.

They refer in the report to expert testimony. We only had one outsider's opinion, and that was Professor Nelson Wiseman. He actually asked us if question period time had been changed, which we thought was quite interesting. The public was not at all involved. There was no unanimous support for what the Liberal government was doing. We had a public that was totally disinterested in this particular issue.

I think the committee and the report should refrain from making comments that would prejudice the opinions of all members of the Legislature. For example, a comment was made that members are generally satisfied with having morning/afternoon meetings instead of afternoon/evening. Well, the members of this House were never polled, and you can't arrive at that type of statement because we never had the opportunity. A statement was made that most members prefer the afternoon time

slot for private members' business. Again, members were not polled, and so that statement certainly is not valid.

The other thing about the splitting of routine proceedings: We're very concerned about what's happened in this House, despite the comments made by the member from Huron–Bruce about more debate time in the House. We actually are seeing less debate time in the House because of the splitting of the debate time. In fact, do you know that between May 5 and June 18, because of the new schedule, we actually lost and didn't debate for 34 hours and 12 minutes? This new debate time is not leading to more time spent on actual debate. I think it's important that some of those things get on the record.

I want to just go and deal with some of the other concerns that we have. As I say, there was little attempt to get any consensus. There was little opportunity for us to have any input into these changes. It was obvious that the government, with the introduction of the changes, had their mind made up. I think it was an attempt to somehow give less and less opportunity for the public to have input into these proceedings. We now have question period in the morning. I think most of us would say that in the afternoon, you could roll a cannon through this House because there's not much going on. So there's less opportunity for anybody to get involved.

But you know what? We recognize the need for standing order changes. We indicated, as far back as February 28 of this year, that we wanted to work with the government. We wanted these standing orders to be tested. We were quite amenable; in fact, we presented another model with an afternoon start time for question period at 1 o'clock, which would have allowed for the same number of hours of debate but would have kept routine proceedings together, and would have allowed more opportunity for people to properly prepare for question period. The government ignored that request and bulldozed ahead to where we are today.

We continue to take issue with the fact that question period is in the morning. We believe it is an attempt by the government to avoid public and media scrutiny. In fact, now, at the end of question period, they know that the reporters have to file their stories, and if some of the ministers stay in here long enough, they can actually avoid the press. We saw that happen last week. We, on the other hand, don't have the same resources and staff that the government does, and I can tell you, the morning clips aren't always ready at 8 o'clock. It makes it pretty tough with limited staff and limited resources to have all the information that you need, particularly now when question period is being moved even earlier to 10:30.

The other thing that's happened, I've noticed, is that we have these awards ceremonies—I know there are a few this month—and the Lieutenant Governor continues to have these in the morning. We used to attend them on behalf of our members, but I can tell you, I've got two this month. I have a responsibility to be here in this House, and so I can't attend those ceremonies with people in my community who are receiving awards. Nobody ever took that into consideration. Maybe we should be

rescheduling those ceremonies to the afternoon, when we, as MPPs, could be there to support the people in our communities who are getting awards.

So we believe this new question period time, which is shifting to 10:30, simply provides the government with an opportunity to avoid public and media scrutiny because they know that the media need to file their stories by lunchtime, and the media simply don't have the same opportunity and the same access.

We had representation from the Queen's Park press gallery, and they actually stated, "The new timing of question period and cabinet and caucus meetings has directly led to what the press gallery strongly feels is reduced access to cabinet ministers." So you know what? They acknowledged too that there was less opportunity. They also refer to the fact that they have this noon crunch time.

If you take a look at the schedule as it exists and as it's going to be changing, you'll see that it's really quite unpredictable. It's inefficient. It's undemocratic. It's erratic. It's centred around question period to the extent where the other routine proceedings just don't seem to matter anymore. That results in a minimized role of the Legislature and its elected non-cabinet officials. We would argue that the way routine proceedings has been split really does impede the smooth operation of the Legislature, and people aren't quite sure what's happening when. Even the Clerk of the Assembly indicated that we might consider reuniting routine proceedings and having them all within one time period rather than what we do today.

It is that change where we have divided routine proceedings that has led to the large gaps in the schedule that we have today and this unused debate time which I referred to. Between May 5 and June 18, we lost a total of 34 hours and 12 minutes of debate time because the House adjourned early. Now, given that the House is supposed to sit for 27 hours per week under the provisional standing orders, do you realize that this new debate time didn't give us more debate? We actually lost five complete sitting days, or more than a complete week of sitting time. So for the government to argue that this is more debate time is hogwash. It simply isn't happening. We should have reunited routine proceedings, which includes oral questions, or question period; it should have been in the afternoon, when more time is available; and we should have made sure that ministers' statements and petitions and everything was back together. The schedule now allows for less public and media scrutiny.

As far as the introduction of guests, we were quite happy to have the Speaker continue to do the introduction of the guests.

We're happy there is going to be a bell to signal the start of question period, but it's not going to solve the much greater problem of the disjointed proceedings in the House. I think that's one of the big problems with all of this.

I would say to the government that you've created a situation where petitions are now being punted out of prime spot. Again, I think you are displaying your lack of

concern for backbenchers. If we take a look at the role that you've given for private members' business, you've now put it on Thursday afternoon, again an example of total disdain and disrespect for the role of the MPPs. You've given it the obvious—you've relegated it to bottom-of-the-barrel status. At that time of day on a Thursday, with no government business left to be debated, there are few people left in this House. Even though you've added one more slot for a private member's bill, the reality is, unless you change the process, it is never going to see the light of day.

1040

We would like to see us take a look at what happens in other jurisdictions, such as Alberta, where private members' bills can be referred to a policy field committee after first reading or cabinet ministers can transfer them to government business.

You trial-ballooned the House schedule; the member from Huron-Bruce said, "Well, they must have supported it." The reality is, we never saw the revised parliamentary calendar, so we couldn't respond to it.

We were shocked to see this suggestion that we begin accepting online petitions—that was never discussed—and we were surprised that the Premier pre-empted the committee's report when he launched an e-petition on September 22, sending the false signal that online petitions are accepted in Ontario.

We believe that these changes that have been made to the standing orders should have more appropriately been dealt with by the House leaders. We should have made sure that all people had an opportunity for real input. Based on the report that we have here today, it doesn't reflect our concerns and it doesn't reflect the concerns of the third party. It is simply an attempt by the government to avoid the scrutiny of the public, of the media, and the whole hearing process turned into a pointless, patronizing exercise, which didn't benefit the people in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? Seeing no further debate, Mr. McMeekin has moved government notice of motion number 86. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being requested, pursuant to standing order 9(d), the vote will be held this afternoon during deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being very close to 10:45, I would ask the members to stand by, pending the return of the Speaker for question period.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning, members. There are some guests we'd like to welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of page Marissa Scott, her mother, Liz Scott; her twin brother, Ethan Scott; her grandfather Frank Golding; and her grandmother Janie Golding, in the members' gallery. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Kenora–Rainy River, we'd like to welcome a 29-member delegation of governors, politicians and policy advisors from the Social Democratic Party of Sweden in the west public gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park and the Ontario Legislature today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday you suggested to the media that your upcoming economic statement will be printed in red ink, and obviously that has generated even more concern among Ontarians about your ability, let alone your willingness, to deal with economic challenges. Perhaps you could give us some insights in terms of your ability and willingness by giving us an update today on how much progress you've made with respect to the \$1 billion included in your budget, where you stressed that to achieve a balanced budget seven months ago you would be looking for \$1 billion in savings and efficiencies. Can you give us an update on the progress there?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontarians can be confident that the government and its five-point plan are managing the challenges in the world economy today as best as can be done. In addition to what the Leader of the Opposition cited in terms of our own internal management opportunities, where we identify savings to be able to invest in things like infrastructure, quality education, quality health care, factors that are important to invest in at a time of economic challenge, we continue to work on a monthly basis through the treasury board and the Management Board of Cabinet. We will be updating the budget numbers on October 22, and I look forward to an opportunity to debate all of that with the leader and others in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I would suggest an important component of getting through difficult times is having confidence in the people making decisions in dealing with the provincial economy. It's regrettable the minister doesn't want to be more forthcoming with the assembly or the people of this province.

We saw more turmoil in the financial markets yesterday. People are rightfully worried: business owners, factory workers, retirees, people just starting out, young people. They're looking for answers.

Minister, will you at least advise us today of the status of the \$800-million rainy-day fund? How much is available today to help us weather this situation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What I can say is this government identified the challenges in the Ontario economy more than a year ago. We began significant investments in infrastructure. Just last month, the Premier announced \$1.1 billion to assist our municipalities. We identified a year ago, particularly for those families who are faced with the prospect of unemployment, the need for skills training and invested more than \$1.5 billion in skills training, and today there are people across the province learning new skills that will help them and their families through this situation.

This government recognized the need for targeted tax relief aimed at manufacturers and foresters as part of a broader solution. Those are the steps that will see Ontario through these challenging times, and we will emerge stronger, better and better equipped to—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The question was to address the concerns of Ontarians, and we get two non-answers. Ontarians have to be—at least the few who get to view our proceedings these days—truly disappointed in the minister's responses. Despite what his Premier described this morning as Ontarians' tremendous anxiety about the state of the economy, we only hear innocuous platitudes from the Minister of Finance.

Minister, will you commit today, in recognition of the gravity of the situation, to an earlier presentation of your economic update and that it will include a detailed plan to address revenue shortfalls and ballooning public sector compensation commitments?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Ontarians support the need for investments in infrastructure, which this government is doing. Ontarians recognize the need to invest in the next generation of jobs, the need to attract new technologies, new jobs to this province. Ontarians embrace the need for better skills training so that we can match people to jobs, and Ontarians most of all recognize the challenge in the world economy today. They recognize and are concerned, obviously, about a range of factors, but what they know is that governments must respond in a balanced and prudent fashion that recognizes that investments in infrastructure, investments in skills training and investments in a range of new technologies are important. Finally, they recognize the need for partnership between governments and others in the—

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

1050

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Minister of Finance. Experts have been repeatedly saying that the mortgage and credit meltdown in the US would affect financial markets worldwide. Our party has warned you repeatedly, Minister, for over a year of the economic storm clouds gathering over Ontario. Now it's pouring

rain, and yet I am shocked to see your reaction in the press yesterday.

If experts saw the warning signs, and we saw the warning signs, as the chief financial officer of Ontario, Minister, how could you have missed them on the horizon? The question is: Are you negligent or just incompetent?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the member to withdraw the comment, the very final comment that he made, please.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I withdraw the comment, Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontarians expect us to show some civility as we debate these very challenging issues.

Some three years ago, this government set up Reaching Higher, which has invested billions in education, just what we need at this time, and that member voted against it. Last year, in infrastructure—you could see the projects up and down the 401—another \$9.9 billion that's employing Ontarians and dealing with long-term structural challenges. You, sir, voted against every single dollar. We're investing more than a billion and a half in training dollars to help unemployed Ontarians. You, sir, voted against it.

The time is for a serious and civil debate on these important issues—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: This past June, our leader, John Tory, demanded an emergency debate on the economy and an immediate economic and financial update. We have persisted; you just resisted. You didn't want to cancel your summer vacation plans.

The Premier told Ontarians that this too shall pass. We've been warning you for the last two years that your high-taxing and high-spending policies would leave this province ill-prepared to deal with an economic crisis, and you dismissed it and procrastinated.

Now you change your tune and you say the world is a different place. Well, no kidding. What you are really saying is that you don't have any plan for saving people's jobs, their homes, their savings. In fact you don't have a clue, do you?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In the budgets of 2006, 2007, 2008 and even before, this government identified and enumerated the challenges that faced the economy. What we did was make unprecedented investments in post-secondary education, unprecedented investments in infrastructure, unprecedented investments in attracting new high-technology jobs to this economy, and we have worked diligently to try to build partnerships with our municipal partners, First Nations and, indeed, even the federal government.

The challenges in the world economy are real. The issues resonate with Ontarians. This government has responded time and again to prepare us for this, and I say it's the right plan at this time. Ontario will be better and stronger for it when—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: The minister talks about investments. Ontarians have seen this movie before. It starred Liberal Premier David Peterson, who recklessly spent this province into a huge deficit. It co-starred the new Liberal Bob Rae, who then spent Ontario through a recession. The idea that the government can spend itself into prosperity did not work then and it won't work now. You say you're looking at previous downturns to indicate the way forward. You've screwed things up over five years.

Will you at least commit to Ontarians that you won't kick them when they're down, that you won't raise their taxes, that you won't introduce any new taxes in your October 22 economic statement?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to reassure Ontarians that the kinds of investments we are making are the types of investments that will help them and their families. Our five-point plan, which sees us investing in infrastructure, sees us investing in new jobs and skills training, sees us building partnerships, is the right approach. I can assure them that this government that balanced a \$5-billion deficit that was left by that member and his party will continue to act prudently and responsibly, making investments where they are needed, making them in a targeted fashion, responding to the needs and interests of Ontario families right across this province.

The challenge is on this Legislature to respond to those families. We are doing that with a comprehensive approach. We'll continue to maintain that and make adjustments where needed, recognizing that Ontario families are counting on us to lead the way through this challenging time.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, Ontarians and their families are hurting. Tens of thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs have been lost in recent months. Today's Vital Signs report shows that family poverty rates have risen 10% in Toronto since the year 2000.

At times like these, governments have a choice. They can throw up their arms and say that nothing can be done, or they can show leadership by assisting those who are losing their jobs and falling into poverty.

My question to the Premier: Would the Premier please state clearly, once and for all, that his government will be there for those Ontarians most affected by these difficult economic times and that the October 22 economic statement will contain specific measures detailing this commitment?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to this issue. Let me start, first of all, generally, by acknowledging what Ontarians are experiencing both in their homes and in their businesses. There's tremendous economic turbulence being felt south of the border, over in Europe, and in the Asian community as well. I think

Ontarians understand that we are not entirely immune from what goes on outside our borders.

I think we also need to acknowledge something we did at the beginning of our first mandate. We recognized that the dollar was going up and, unlike previous times, it was going to stay up. We recognized that oil was going to go up and, unlike previous times, it was going to stay up. We recognized that for the very first time the full consequences of globalization would be visited on Ontarians, especially on our businesses. We anticipated that. We took some steps to address that, and in the supplemental I'll speak to those.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: If the Premier recognized all of that, then I hope the Premier has an answer for the second part.

In economic downturns, active government engagement is more important than ever. As economist Mike McCracken wrote in last Saturday's Toronto Star, "The sensible approach in a recession is to stimulate the economy with government spending in areas that help people obtain work."

Will the Premier pledge to Ontarians that his government will make a commitment to these kinds of investments, programs and supports when it issues its October 22 economic statement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, recognizing as we did the global economic realities when we first formed the government, we took a number of steps and we moved very quickly. I think it was four years ago that we put out our Reaching Higher plan, a massive \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary studies. That means that today we have 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities. In our last three budgets, we also invested massive amounts in infrastructure. Today, as a result of that, there are over a dozen major projects under way in Ontario, employing over 10,000 workers. Three years ago, we understood the value of innovation, so we created a brand new Ministry of Research and Innovation. So far, we've invested \$1.5 billion in over 1,000 projects to help build the new jobs of the future. Those are steps that we took several years ago.

We have a solid plan in place. We will continue to move forward on that plan.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to remind the Premier that my two questions have been about the poor and poverty, and you have yet to say a word about them.

The Premier sometimes speaks as though protecting those at risk of poverty during an economic slowdown is irresponsible and pointless. Even as the ranks of the poor are swelling day by day, the Premier has suggested that the government has to "focus on core priorities," and its poverty reduction strategy seems not to be a priority any longer.

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Will the Premier agree that now is not the time to backtrack on government action to support the eco-

nomically vulnerable, but rather it is the time to invest in Ontarians to ensure that as many people as possible are healthy, productive and fully contributing members to our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll try to speak more specifically to the question. I think one of the things we enjoy here in this House is the opportunity, the responsibility and the privilege to give expression to the values that we share as Ontarians. I think, in the face of an economic downturn, as our revenues shrink, Ontarians expect us to manage carefully, to act responsibly, to be thoughtful and particularly to protect those who experience real challenges as a result of this downturn. So we will protect those public services that families have to be able to count on and we will find a way, notwithstanding our economic challenges, to move forward in a real and meaningful way to lend greater assistance to people growing up in poverty in the province of Ontario.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: To continue in this same line, as of July 31 the government had received at least 92 submissions to its poverty consultations. These are detailed submissions from diverse groups that include low-income people who have thought deeply about how best to reduce poverty, their own and others. The government has said that it is taking seriously the recommendations from these groups, some of which could be implemented immediately.

Can the Premier indicate which of the many recommendations of these 92 contained in the submissions will be included in the October 22 economic statement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do want to acknowledge the tremendous interest that has been generated by our commitment to reduce poverty in this province. Across the province, people have gathered around their kitchen tables, around boardroom tables and have really started to talk about solutions. They started to talk about what can we do as a community, what can we do as a business community or a faith community, what can we do to improve opportunities for people living in poverty in this province. They also, of course, have given us some really good advice on what they expect us to do, what they expect the federal government to do. We are moving very quickly towards the release of our poverty reduction strategy. I look forward to the time when we do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplemental?

Mr. Michael Prue: I think moving quickly would be a commitment to contain something in the October 22 statement. The government may not have had time to read the submissions, but we have. There are several priorities that are shared by many of the organizations. Two of the most commonly mentioned priorities are the need to increase access to affordable housing and the need to increase access to public child care. Today's Vital Signs report shows that housing is becoming less

and less affordable; half of all renters in Toronto now pay more than a third of their income in rent.

Could the minister affirm to Ontarians that these are, indeed, important components of a poverty reduction plan and that a significant down payment on affordable housing and children will be introduced on October 22?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm going to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to talk about this multi-pronged question.

Hon. Jim Watson: The honourable member does bring up a very valid point. Housing is an important component of the poverty reduction strategy and this has been front and centre at public consultations that I've held in my riding and other members have held in their ridings. That's why we're proud of the fact that we're the government that did sign the affordable housing program agreement with the previous federal government. To date, 6,301 units have been built; 2,063 are under construction; 3,650 are awaiting planning approval; and the remainder, 8,737, are with local service managers. All of the money has been allocated. It's in the field, and houses are being built. Do we have to do more? Yes, and we encourage the federal government to come to the table and help us with the affordable housing program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to whichever minister will be handed the ball in the next round: Addressing poverty today reduces costs that governments must bear tomorrow. Investing \$1 in child care saves \$3 in future social costs. Investing \$1 in affordable housing saves \$4 in emergency shelter costs or up to \$12 in hospitals and prisons. Poverty reduction matters to Ontarians. A recent survey found that it was the fourth most important issue in this federal election.

Will whoever assure Ontarians that the government is not going to go slow on poverty reduction, but will move ahead strongly by committing in the upcoming budget and in the upcoming financial statement to reducing poverty by at least 25% in the next five years, and by making a significant down payment for poverty reduction initiatives?

Hon. Jim Watson: I refer to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The statistics that the member opposite cites are exactly the reason that we are moving forward on poverty reduction. We acknowledge that we can't afford the levels of poverty that we currently have. We are committed to reducing poverty in this province. The Ontario child benefit, which was introduced in the March 2007 budget, is in the hands of families across the province right now. Many people said, on the poverty reduction consultations, "What we need is more money in our pocket." The Ontario child benefit does exactly that: It puts more money in people's pockets.

On the child care front, I think it's very important to acknowledge the progress that we've made, despite the

cuts to our child care funding from the federal government—

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

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Premier. Your new Minister of International Trade is travelling in Saudi Arabia, a trip funded by Ontario's taxpayers. There was no press release, no details released. Sound familiar?

What companies went with her, what contracts do they hope to obtain, and what will be the cost to Ontario taxpayers, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the ways that we've always understood that we need to put more muscle into our economic growth—we've got so many of our eggs in the US export market that we knew we had to expand. So we have opened up a number of international offices, for example. We now have a minister devoted exclusively to pursuing international trade opportunities. Minister Papatello is in the Middle East. She is visiting the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. She's leading 20 Ontario companies to a networking exhibition in the UAE. We have heard for a long time about the vitality associated with the UAE, particularly Dubai, as a new financial sector. We know it's time for Ontarians to exploit opportunities in that part of the world, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It wasn't long ago that the Premier promised Ontario a Fiat auto plant. He went to Italy, only to return empty-handed. It was embarrassing for the Premier and it was also embarrassing for Ontario. Is this trip to Saudi Arabia simply another junket paid for by taxpayers, and can we expect the same results again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that, notwithstanding the wording of that question, the honourable member recognizes that it's absolutely essential, in an era of globalization, that we reach out to the rest of the world, that we find new opportunities, that we increase new trade ties, that we find more markets for Ontario innovators and entrepreneurs to sell their products, and that we lure new foreign direct investment into Ontario to secure new investment here and create new job opportunities here. That's exactly the kind of initiative that Ms. Papatello is pursuing.

We don't necessarily get the answer we're looking for every time, we don't necessarily get the answer we're looking for right away, but I know that Ontarians expect us to work as hard as we can, and we'll continue to pursue these opportunities

HEALTH PROMOTION

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. In the gallery today there are 27 visitors from the Swedish Social Democratic Party. They are here to learn about the health status of Ontarians.

Sweden has been a leader in developing comprehensive health goals that recognize the social determinants of health. They have set goals to improve economic and social security, to improve working lives and to improve community and social participation, because those are important to keep people healthy.

Does the government recognize and seek to improve the many social and economic conditions that influence health status, and what targets have they set?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for her question. This government is certainly very concerned about the health of Ontarians—and of all the people of Ontario. That is why this government has started this Ministry of Health promotion, which was introduced in 2005, to address the issues of health promotion in terms of keeping people healthy. This government recognizes that when we keep people healthy in Ontario, it will be a tremendous benefit, not just to us as members of communities in Ontario, but also to the health care system in Ontario. We continue to work with all kinds of programs in this particular ministry that address the issue of health promotion in terms of chronic disease prevention, injury prevention, and the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Mr. Speaker, this party certainly welcomes a health promotion ministry, but it's hard to consider it a priority when the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care spends \$45 billion and the Ministry of Health \$130 million. There is a wide spread here. We can see where the priority is. In 2006, the government pledged to develop a 10-year health strategy, and they held consultations about it, but this process seems to be going nowhere.

Experience in Sweden shows that setting goals for improving working conditions, income security, social equality and the environment pays huge benefits to improving population health. Does the minister agree that there is a need to set measurable targets for health improvement—of health goals, as the Swedish would say—that focus on the social determinants of health? Will the government develop such goals as part of their 10-year health strategy?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I agree with the member opposite that we do need to set targets to determine the health of Ontarians. We certainly have been doing that in the Ministry of Health Promotion. Part of the things that we do in this particular ministry that are aimed again at keeping Ontarians healthy include having 49 new satellite community health centres, which are part of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and are in our communities to assist our Ontarians in moving forward with keeping healthier. We also have a diabetes prevention strategy; recently our government introduced a \$741-million diabetes prevention strategy. We continue to move forward—

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

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. As you are aware, the city of Toronto, including my riding of York South–Weston has experienced a rash of shootings over the past several weeks. One incident in particular has significantly shaken our community. A few weeks ago, an 18-year-old was gunned down while waiting at a bus stop. Since that horrific accident, I have met with local residents, the business improvement association and 12 division of the Toronto Police Service to get a better grasp of what steps our community could be taking to tackle violent crime in the area. The meeting was attended by actively engaged neighbours, as well as the Spice Isle Association, who work to cultivate good communications between police and the community. I was pleased to see that there was a very active partner at the table, the Eglinton Hill BIA. All of these partners are working to make sure that the communities engage, talk about crime, and how we can prevent—

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

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for outlining the question so well and for her incredible advocacy within her own community. Crime of any type deeply affects our community, and that's why we as a government will do everything we can possibly do. That's why we're investing \$37 million a year in the Safer Communities—1,000 Officers program, which has translated into 250 new police officers for the Toronto Police Service. That's why we're funding the previous government's community policing program: \$68 million is invested each year to ensure that we have 2,000 more police officers on the—

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is so important to have a continued commitment to stopping the spread of violent crime. Increasing the number of police on our streets is a crucial part of reducing crime, and a real connection to the community is needed to achieve tangible results.

In my meeting with the local staff sergeant, we talked about community policing at length. This approach helps to break down the barriers between local residents and the police, leading to greater co-operation and ultimately to more success in keeping our streets safe.

The residents of York South–Weston work directly with both community police liaison committees of officers of 12 division and 31 division on issues of community safety. This interaction develops trust and promotes open dialogue with concerned citizens.

Can the minister please explain to the House what actions this government is taking to further the community policing approach in Ontario?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That is a very important question. Our government is investing \$73 million a year on the guns and gangs strategy. We're also making very significant investments in the Toronto anti-violence inter-

vention strategy, known as TAVIS. We're also investing in the provincial anti-violence intervention strategy, known as PAVIS. But you know what? We have to invest in other programs as well, so we are investing \$28 million to create a youth opportunity strategy to help young people faced with challenges achieve success. This important strategy includes a summer jobs for youth program, developing skills for future careers in policing, youth and policing initiatives and school-based prevention programs.

Listen, this strategy has to encompass all sectors within the province of Ontario. I'm pleased with the efforts—

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

TOURISM

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier and it concerns tourism. Our tourism industry is beginning to wonder whether the tourism competitiveness study is really just an \$8-million farewell tour for the member from Vaughan. Over the years, Ontario tourism has been studied and studied and studied. In fact, we've counted 21 separate studies and reports in recent years, yet the challenges remain. The tourism competitiveness study could have been done at no incremental cost to the taxpayer and could have been completed in 90 days, in time for last summer's tourism season. How can the Premier justify such imprudent spending of \$8 million of taxpayers' dollars when he is asking Ontarians to tighten their belts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the competitiveness study, having just been at the opening of the Ontario Tourism Summit which is happening today in Toronto, with over 400 to 500 participants. It is an exciting opportunity for our Ontario tourism marketing partners to gather together and talk about how we can improve tourism for the province.

We've been working closely with our partners for a number of years, and my predecessors Minister Fonseca and Minister Bradley have worked closely with our partners and answered their concerns and their requests for a competitiveness study, which was promised in our platform, which was announced in last year's budget and which is moving forward under the able leadership of Greg Sorbara, who is well respected within the industry. They are delighted with the work he is doing, the travel he has done across the province, his discussions with a variety of stakeholders within the tourism industry and outside as we set the platform and the stage for moving forward with our tourism—

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: If the member for Vaughan is going to be named the tourism czar and if only he can find the solutions to the problems facing tourism, he could have been appointed to a select committee of the Legislature

and the study could have been done in 90 days at absolutely no incremental cost to the taxpayer.

The Premier's refusal to answer this question shows that he is oblivious to the concerns of the tourism industry. While people are losing sleep because of their worries about their savings, their homes and their jobs, the government blew \$2.3 million on a one-night party at the Windsor casino, possibly the most lavish, expensive and self-indulgent bash in Ontario's history. When many Ontarians couldn't afford holidays this past summer, this government wasted millions on hotel rooms—some ministries up by almost 50%. Will the minister commit to reining in the government's wasteful spending addictions and will the Premier follow the example set by millions of Ontarians who are having to tighten their belts because of this economic crisis?

1120

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I appreciate the opportunity to continue to discuss what we're doing with the tourism industry in partnership. As the member opposite knows, he was invited to attend the summit. I understand his staff is there today and I think he'll be attending tonight or this afternoon—and I hope you will, because I can tell you that through my participation this morning, the 400 people who are there are very excited about the competitiveness study. They're very supportive of this initiative. They're also very supportive of the other expenditures that we've made in the tourism industry to try to support the tourism industry in this difficult time.

Since 2006, we've invested 14.5 million new dollars through our economic stimulation packages to enhance our Ontario festivals. Through our There's No Place Like This campaign, we've encouraged Ontarians to visit Ontario, and we've seen a 5% increase in our domestic tourism this year. We've also seen that campaign expand into the States through an additional investment of \$20 million, and we're targeting markets such as Boston—

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

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In rubber-stamping a major hospital restructuring without hearing the public, the local health integration network for Hamilton has shown that it lacks the process, the analytical skill and the capacity to make good and thoughtful decisions.

Hamilton city council, our Hamilton and District Labour Council, our EMS paramedics, hospital doctors and the community at large are all demanding that the LHIN live up to its mandate and hold proper public hearings. Will the minister side with our community and tell the long-elected LHIN board to start over because the government actually wants a proper process with full community participation and input?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, it is people in the local community, both at Hamilton Health Sciences and at the local health integration network, who have been able to

craft this plan and deliver I think what's going to be better health care for Hamiltonians.

I quote Dr. Robert Issenman, professor at McMaster University. He says: "This plan is a 'win-win' for adults. Saying yes to this plan opens the door to the most modern medical care for the most people, supporting the health and growth of the city." This member should be aware that Hamilton city council has declared their goal is to make Hamilton the best place in the world to raise a child. In fact, these decisions are in keeping with the desire identified by Hamilton city council to do just that.

In fact, I would go further. I have more information for the member about some of the local decisions and the local benefits of the plan, and I would be happy to offer those in the supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I certainly do know what the goals and priorities of my community are because I actually listen to what the community says when big plans are coming forward. Our community is saying very loudly and strongly that they're not happy with the process that the LHIN undertook.

In fact, a board member from the LHIN actually resigned. Stephen Birch quit the LHIN board after the sham job it did of researching and analyzing the Hamilton hospital proposal. He says the LHIN's weakness does not bode well for the future of health care in Hamilton and that the LHIN of Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand and Brock has actually made a huge mistake.

The Ontario Ombudsman has the authority to investigate LHIN networks, and I have requested that he launch an investigation into the LHIN in our community. Does the minister support having the Ombudsman review this LHIN and its failure to live up to its mandate and insist on community consultation, or is he okay with the failed process that happened with our LHIN in our region?

Hon. David Caplan: Nothing could be further from the truth than what the member suggests. In fact, in today's Hamilton Spectator, under the heading which says, "LHIN Showed Leadership," I'd like to quote the article from Lee Prokaska for the member opposite: "It's time to let go of parochial concerns and emotional rhetoric and accept that Hamilton Health Sciences' restructuring of its facilities is a good thing, not just for Hamiltonians, but also for those in the broad geographic area served by our city's hospitals.

"The restructuring, which will see a paediatric emergency room at the McMaster site and other specialties focused in other sites, will provide our community with unprecedented specialty strength and facilities capable of attracting world-class medical talent.

"There is no evidence these changes—even the lack of adult ER services at Mac—will be anything but good for everyone in the HHS"—

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Transportation.

I know that both the minister and our government make transportation a high priority, particularly in developing new transportation links in the riding of Peterborough. With the busy schedules that most people living and working in Ontario maintain, getting from point A to B as quickly as possible is vital to their lives. Many residents of Peterborough who travel to Toronto for work and for pleasure are eager to see the completion of the extension of the 407. People travelling to Peterborough or to cottage country from the GTA are looking forward to having the opportunity to use the 407 extension to Highway 115 north as an alternative route.

To the Minister of Transportation: Please provide those interested in the 407 extension with a timeline as to when they can expect this important project to be completed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's an excellent question, I must say. Transportation, as he knows, is a priority of this particular government. That is why we are working to complete the 407 east environmental assessment study. In fact, we plan to submit the EA for review and approval in mid-2009, and this project is scheduled for completion as early as 2013.

A preferred route has been selected for a new east-west transportation corridor to extend Highway 407 easterly to Highway 35/115, and two north-south links connecting Highway 401 to the proposed extension of Highway 407, one in west Durham and one in east Durham.

I'm sure the member would be interested to know that we're looking at both a highway and a transitway expansion. This is part of our commitment to getting people out of their personal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: A topic that is being widely discussed in Peterborough today is the train. Another transportation issue that has seen a great deal of media coverage in my riding is the possibility of re-established train service to Peterborough. Those who travel back and forth to the GTA on a daily or weekly basis are very interested, as we are, in this initiative. Currently, the only transportation available for commuters is bus service or driving their own vehicles. With the high cost of gasoline and the need to reduce the number of vehicles on our highways for sound environmental reasons, the possibility of alternative means of travel such as rail service is attractive. Train service would offer commuters an opportunity to travel to the GTA without having the worry of dealing with traffic volumes or weather conditions.

Would the Minister of Transportation provide the residents of Peterborough with an update on this initiative?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First, I'd like to acknowledge the tireless work of the provincial member for Peterborough on transportation issues.

Since 2003, this government has invested more than \$72 million in the city of Peterborough for transit, highway, municipal roads and bridges. We recognize the transit needs of the residents of Peterborough. In March

we announced, together with the federal government, \$195 million in public transit capital trust funding, committing to initiating a joint study of a possible Peterborough commuter rail line, accelerating the extension of the GO rail service from Lakeshore east to Bowmanville, launching GO bus service to Peterborough. The joint study on the introduction of a passenger rail service to Peterborough will be led by Metrolinx, the regional transit planning authority. The joint federal and provincial study is expected to begin this fall. I—

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

TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. The 2009-19 Nipissing Forest forest management plan is currently being developed. The proposed route for moving logs out of the Nipissing Forest is through the village of Restoule, along Hawthorne Drive. Community members are very concerned about the safety of residents. Minister, will you review the proposed route to ensure that the concerns of the community are being considered?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. Absolutely, we're committed to work with the community. We recognize that there's a balance within the community, ensuring that there's safety in movement of the logs, and at the same time we want to ensure employment within the community and that there is a balance. So we are more than committed to work with the community to find the safest way to move the logs through, recognizing that there are limitations. We've had a number of meetings with the community. We have looked at alternative routes. I know they recently had another meeting at the beginning of the month with the community. I'm waiting for the results of that discussion. But I can assure the member that we will include safety as a top priority in any final decision and that the community will have input.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.
1130

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for that response, Minister. Hawthorne Drive is a narrow road. It's quite steep in some places and includes a one-lane bridge. It goes right through the village of Restoule, very close to homes. Along the proposed route are the Restoule branch of the Canadian Legion and two churches.

Residents of all ages have written to me, they've written to you and they've written to Nipissing Forest Resource Management Inc. to demand that an alternative route be selected. The good news is, there are two possible routes that cross private property and are considered to be feasible alternatives. Minister, will you listen to the concerns of the community and push for the selection of one of the feasible alternative routes?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to reiterate: We are prepared to look at all resolutions. We recognize that the people of Restoule themselves want to have a logging

industry and that they just have some concerns around the safety of the delivery of those logs, and we share those concerns. So if we can have a resolution that really addresses all of those issues, then you have my commitment that we will be doing that. That consultation is taking place. It may be an alternative that we look to private land. We will investigate all sources for alternatives for the people of Restoule.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. On June 9, I raised the issue that the ministry is allowing Hamilton OW to cut off grandparents who are raising their grandchildren from temporary care assistance while grandparents in other municipalities continue to receive this assistance. The minister admitted, "Different municipalities have applied different rules, and I thank the member from the NDP for bringing this to my attention. We need to review it. We cannot apply rules in different areas differently." What has this minister done since June 9, when she recognized this problem about applying her ministry's rule differently?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a very good question, and I thank the member for raising that with me. Yes, indeed it was true: Different municipalities would apply different rules. So I've asked—and it was done—the staff from the ministry to give extra training to the member municipalities to make sure that the rules are applied the same all over. This being said, I'm not asking the director of services to not use his or her judgment for special circumstances. The training has been done, and let's hope that the rules will be applied the same way in different municipalities.

Mr. Paul Miller: Minister, I'm not quite sure you answered the question. You're either going to apply the rules or you're not going to apply the rules. Are you going to cut everybody off or are you just going to cut some off? Today will be the second time my staff has met with Hamilton OW on this issue. How many times has this minister or her staff met with the OW management to let them know that they are applying the rules, as she said, "differently"? Minister, the time for studies, reviews and talk is over. Will you direct the Hamilton OW to reinstate temporary care assistance to Hamilton grandparents raising their grandchildren immediately? This is a disgrace.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I think that I was clear, but if someone wants to help me say it in clearer language than I did—I said that what the member raised with me, after investigation, was right, so I've asked staff from my ministry to make sure that they have written rules and that there was extra training to municipal members to make sure that the rules are applied the same all over the province. This being said, I am not asking the director of services in municipalities to not use his or her judgment in special circumstances.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bruce Crozier: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. According to the Wine Council of Ontario, when an Ontario consumer purchases local Ontario wines, that consumer is contributing \$8.48 per litre to the local economy. This is compared to buying a litre of imported wine, which only contributes some 67 cents. In the last fiscal year alone, the Ontario wine industry contributed \$529 million to the Ontario economy, a jump of more than 160% over the last decade. Clearly, the industry is having a significant impact on our economy.

Minister, as we face challenging times with our manufacturing sector, the Ontario wine industry is a welcome bright light. Knowing this, what exactly is the government doing to foster the continuing growth of Ontario's wine industry?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the member for Essex for his question. He's been a tireless champion of the wineries in his riding and across Ontario. That's why he recently won the wine council award for advocacy.

And he's right: The Ontario grape and wine industry is an important contributor to our economy, and it has grown over the past decade to now support almost 7,000 jobs. Since 2004, the McGuinty government has invested more than \$25 million in the grape and wine industry, including funding for marketing and research for Ontario wineries that sell VQA wines to the LCBO. The government has also established a wine secretariat, chaired by the member from St. Catharines. Without a doubt, this government wants to ensure the grape and wine industry continues to be strong and viable in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I want to thank the minister for providing some insight about what we're doing to strengthen Ontario's wine industry. However, along with being a significant player in the economy, Ontario's wine industry also plays a major role in this province's tourism sector. In fact, Ontario's wine regions attract almost a million tourists annually. I know the government implemented a by-the-glass liquor licence in May of this year, allowing Ontario wineries and breweries to sell and serve their wine and beer for consumption in single servings from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. However, in order to enhance the tourism experience, wineries asked that the hours be extended beyond the 6 p.m. cut-off, allowing tourists to extend their visit to the wineries.

Can the minister inform the House as to whether you've listened to the concerns of our wineries in their efforts to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to announce that we have listened. How can you have an advocate like this without listening?

I'm pleased to announce that, effective August 13, 2008, the hours of sale and service under the by-the-glass liquor licence have been extended to 9 p.m. This change

was introduced after broad consultation with stakeholders and is designed to further enhance the ability of Ontario wineries and breweries to provide a first-rate tourist experience.

We're committed to that. We're pleased to make this change. We believe the change will help the tourism industry. Again, I want to applaud the member from Essex for his wonderful advocacy on behalf of his wineries.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Premier. Premier, in 2005, your government ordered the region of Halton to grow, and grow they did. Milton is the fastest-growing community in Canada, but your plan was sloppy and somewhat reckless. Halton doesn't have adequate health care facilities. The new Oakville hospital is delayed and the much-needed expansion is not even on the books. The situation is so dire that the chair of Halton region has just tabled a motion to suspend all further development in Halton until your government fulfills its promises. Premier, do you understand the severity of this situation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, we are engaged in the largest expansion of hospital capital facilities this province has ever seen—over 100 projects. And I regret to inform you, when this member was on this side of the House, he did not take even a moment's notice or any bit of effort to get them moving along. It was this government, this Premier, this Ministry of Health, working with our colleagues in infrastructure, that have got these projects going.

I'm very proud that we're seeing in Halton region a move toward a new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. I'm pleased that we're seeing this expansion right across the province. We are going through further rounds of capital planning. I have said to the member in the past, and I'll say in the future, that we want to get to all of the various sites right across the province—

1140

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I want the people of Halton to understand this government's planning process, although "government planning" is an oxymoron, looking at their record.

They have made no less than four announcements in the past about their grand plans for the Halton hospital. They alerted the media, made colourful signs and smiled for the photographers, but when they decided to stall the project, delay it for a year, they made no announcements. They hid from view and they made excuses. Now the municipal government is threatening to stop issuing building permits until you act, until you fulfill your promises.

If Halton completely stops growing, the negative economic impact and social effects will be huge. What immediate action are you going to take to solve this issue for the people of Halton, and when will they get the health care that they deserve?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, base funding for Halton health sciences has increased by almost 53%, a recognition that we need to be able to provide additional resources. I want to contrast that with this member and the avowed position of him and his party to cut \$3 billion out of our health care system. Undoubtedly, that would affect Halton health sciences; undoubtedly, that would see a reduction in patient service that I know that Oakville and Halton residents desperately would not want to see.

I know that I was, along with Kevin Flynn, able to provide the deed to a wonderful site that will house the new Halton health sciences building. I know that we've moved along, through the great work that Infrastructure Ontario has done, to be able to realize these kinds of capital projects. I know that these take time and I know that—

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

TANNING SALONS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. A Canadian Cancer Society report points to the risk posed by tanning beds and the need for stronger regulation of tanning salons. More than 50,000 Ontario youth use tanning beds, which contribute to skin cancer. Skin cancer is the second most common cancer among young people. The Canadian Cancer Society report found that 60% of Toronto salons did not prevent youth under the age of 16 from using the tanning beds as they are supposed to under Health Canada guidelines.

Will the government heed the cancer society's recommendation to ban the provision of tanning salon services to youth under 18?

Hon. David Caplan: To the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question. The Ministry of Health Promotion is aware of the concerns about the impact of exposure to ultraviolet radiation in tanning salons and its links to skin cancer.

The regulation of tanning beds falls under the federal Radiation Emitting Devices Act, which is administered by Health Canada. Health Canada guidelines for tanning salon owners, operators and users do not recommend the use of tanning beds for children under the age of 16. They also state that, depending on provincial and territorial regulations, a minor may require written parental consent for using tanning beds.

I believe it's important that we look at this as a very important issue. I certainly believe that parents also have a very important role to play in ensuring that children under the age of 16 do not use tanning beds.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We don't disagree that the federal government has a role to play, but so does the Ministry of Health Promotion. You could put forward a

bill that addresses the need to ban advertising to youth, you could improve staff training at the salon to make sure they are aware of UV damage, you could create a registry of all tanning salons, and you could better monitor the use of those salons by youth, just as examples coming from the other side of the House. It is up to your government to be proactive on those issues.

When does the minister plan to take this public health issue seriously and bring forward a comprehensive plan of action within her mandate to protect the health of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: The Ministry of Health Promotion is committed to supporting the importance of public awareness about the use of tanning salons. As well, I would like to recognize my colleague Khalil Ramal, the member from London-Fanshawe, for his leadership on this issue. He introduced a private member's bill, Bill 83, which is currently before a standing committee. We're looking forward to hearing what the committee has to say about the bill.

We are very, very aware of the importance of keeping our children healthy, and we will continue to look at this issue. It's a very important issue to us and to me as the Minister of Health Promotion. We will continue to work to increase public awareness about the use of and the risks associated with tanning beds.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that has been submitted to me by a number of the surgeons at Credit Valley hospital, from signatures collected from among their patients. It reads as follows:

"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."

It's an excellent petition. I'm pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Timothy to carry it for me.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

STROKE SURVIVORS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a complete lack of government-funded outpatient therapy for stroke survivors upon discharge from hospital in the city of Cambridge, Ontario; and

"Whereas, on October 29, 2004, a state-of-the-art government-funded outpatient hospital program, which included therapy programs for stroke survivors discharged from the hospital, was cut by the Cambridge Memorial Hospital due to a lack of provincial funds;

"We, the undersigned stroke survivors, caregivers, family members and friends of stroke survivors in Cambridge, Ontario, draw your attention to the following:

"That the absence of a government-funded outpatient therapy program leaves many stroke survivors who are unable to pay for private therapy with a gap in services. As a result of this lack of therapy, many survivors despair and regress; and

"That therapy is critical to restoring a survivor's ability to function and become rehabilitated and reintegrated in the community, as opposed to being forced to enter a long-term-care facility, thus saving the system money while greatly improving the quality of life for stroke survivors and their families; and

"That the outpatient therapy is relatively inexpensive. A full-time physiotherapist and occupational therapist and half-time speech-language pathologist and social

worker required to deliver the service cost less per day than one bed in the hospital;

"Therefore, we request that the Ontario government give priority to restoring a government-funded outpatient therapy program in Cambridge, Ontario, to provide desperately needed rehabilitation for stroke survivors (and others with similar needs) after discharge from hospital."

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I affix my name thereto.

1150

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to accept a petition that's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario from among the parishioners of our Polish church in Mississauga, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

I'm also pleased to acknowledge the efforts of my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora to support this petition, and ask page Michael to carry it for me.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition with hundreds and hundreds of names on it. It's compiled by the good people at Global Pet Foods on Eglinton Avenue in my riding. They signed this petition in support of Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial

Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends.”

I support this and I give it to page Lauren, who I'm sure is an animal lover too.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There seem to be no further petitions. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1152 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

Mr. Ted Arnott: In the past 18 years in which I've been privileged to serve in this Ontario Legislature, I've always endeavoured to work closely with municipal councils and staff in my riding. That's why I was so glad to learn last week that the county of Wellington has been acknowledged as one of Canada's top 100 employers by the national news magazine Maclean's.

In the Maclean's article, the county was given credit for its offices in a heritage area close to daycare facilities, transit subsidies and secure bike parking, as well as a generous pension plan.

Being recognized as one of the best employers in Canada means the county of Wellington will be better able to retain its existing top-notch staff performers and in the future, as new opportunities arise, attract the very best people. This translates into an even higher standard of service to the ratepayers and the people of Wellington county.

We in Wellington county and Halton Hills have never been ones to rest on our laurels. In both the public and private sectors, through visionary planning, dedicated persistence and a high degree of ethical and social responsibility, we set the bar high, strive our best to cross it and then set it higher still.

The county of Wellington will celebrate this well-deserved accolade, and it will inspire our staff to continue to be the best they can be, making us all very proud in the process.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I would like to talk with people in western Mississauga and all across Ontario about this province's commitment to help displaced workers in communities get back on their feet. The cornerstone of this commitment is second career, an innovative program to assist workers who have been laid off. Second career will help individuals get new skills necessary to compete and to succeed in this new economy.

In June, Ontario launched second career, which will provide \$355 million to help 20,000 laid-off workers train for long-term, high-skill occupations that are in demand in their communities. This investment also partners each of these participants with an Employment

Ontario counsellor who can provide one-on-one, individualized counselling to establish a return-to-work action plan that reflects the needs, the experience and the education of each participant. Ontario's commitment to workers and their families is also seen in the \$500-million advanced manufacturing fund that has maintained or created 4,000 jobs since it was implemented.

These job growth strategies are just two examples of Ontario's commitment to workers throughout the province. We understand the challenges of this new economy, and we will continue to work with Ontarians to succeed in it.

WHEELABRATOR

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to congratulate Wheelabrator Group in Burlington. Wheelabrator has just celebrated its 100th year in business, all in Burlington. Wheelabrator Group is the world's largest, most experienced and trusted brand name in surface preparation and finishing. They are an impressive example of taking a difficult time in our economy and finding the silver lining.

Wheelabrator's cutting edge technologies have reduced costs and energy in-house for the benefit of their customers. They have successfully reduced their corporate carbon footprint and that of their clients.

I was proud to join with them in their celebration of this impressive milestone, and I want to wish them yet another 100 years of success in Burlington.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

SOUTIENS À L'EMPLOI

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We know that we have among us today people from across Ontario from the OSSTF, who are here in order to lobby all of us, on both sides of the House, with regard to issues that are important not only to them and their members, but to parents and kids as well, in regard to the schools and universities they represent.

J'ai eu le plaisir aujourd'hui d'avoir une rencontre avec du monde de la région d'Ottawa et de la région de Prescott-Russell, et de parler exactement des défis qu'ils ont dans l'ouvrage qu'ils ont à faire, l'ouvrage des professeurs et de ceux en soutien qui fait affaire avec le soutien pour les jeunes et les enfants en difficulté.

Il y a beaucoup d'ouvrage à faire et il y a un manque de ressources, ce qui veut dire qu'à la fin de la journée, ces jeunes-là n'ont pas l'appui dont ils ont besoin pour être capables d'avancer et ils n'ont pas ce dont ils ont besoin comme soutien pour devenir des pleins membres de notre société quand ils finissent le système scolaire.

On a eu la chance de parler avec ceux de l'Université d'Ottawa qui ont décidé récemment de se joindre à l'OSSTF et les défis qu'eux autres ont dans le secteur de l'université. Ce qui est vraiment intéressant, c'est qu'il y a un lien entre l'un et l'autre. Si on apprend quelque

chose aujourd'hui de ces deux bords de l'allée, c'est de prendre ce qu'ils nous disent sérieusement et de regarder comment on peut donner le soutien, parce que ce n'est pas juste pour eux autres, c'est pour les enfants et ceux qui les soutiennent dans l'ouvrage qu'ils font chaque jour.

On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, we want to say welcome to all the members of the OSSTF. Welcome to the assembly, and we'll see you a little bit later.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: This past weekend, I had the pleasure of attending a local event in my riding of York South–Weston where I had the opportunity to meet a very interesting group of youth named Reckless. The group, notwithstanding its name, sends a positive message of friendship and non-violence that engages youth to think about the choices they make.

The group was established with the help of the Trethewey “Our Expressions” organization in the Martha Eaton Way high-rises, in an area that has been known to be a tougher neighbourhood. The Trethewey organization offers youth the opportunity to engage in meaningful programs that challenge them to reach their full potential. The Trethewey organization runs a number of programs, which include homework clubs, recreational activity and reading advancement. There is also a very strong focus on communicating a message, a story or a life experience.

I take this opportunity today to highlight Michael, Ricardo, Chayo and Trevon because of their choice to stay active and engage others with a positive message. They tell a story of residents in the riding of York South–Weston who are working hard to create stronger, safer and more resilient communities for everyone, and I encourage them to continue.

MALLORY FAMILY

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to congratulate the Mallory family of Essa township for reaching the summit of Mount Everest at over 8,848 metres.

The family of five, including Dan Mallory, his two sons, Adam and Alan, his daughter, Laura, and wife, Barbara, set out on this courageous journey in early April of this year. Only taking the family six weeks to complete, they all, except for Barbara, who was injured on the trek, reached the summit on May 25 and 26. On completion, the family joined the list of only 3,000 people in the world to have completed such a feat. In addition, Laura set a new record for being the youngest Canadian female, at 20 years old, to make it to the summit. This outstanding achievement is a testimony to the Mallorys' talent, dedication and courage.

In addition to being avid climbers, the family has participated in a number of marathons, triathlons and adventure races throughout the world.

While in part they say they do it for the adrenaline rush, the family has the much more humble purpose of inspiring others to reach beyond expectations. They strive to encourage young people to challenge themselves in everything they do and to never limit themselves with preconceptions.

On behalf of the people of Simcoe–Grey, and I'm sure all members of this Legislature, I want to once again congratulate the Mallory family on this amazing achievement and thank them for being such an inspiration to so many.

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Fire Prevention Week in Ontario. This year's theme is preventing home fires.

In June, our government took steps to minimize the risks caused by home fires by introducing changes to the building code that would make sprinklers mandatory in all new multi-unit residential occupancies of more than three storeys beginning in 2010. Requiring residential sprinklers in new buildings three storeys and higher will save lives and protect families for generations to come. It's an important and meaningful legacy for this government.

Last month in Minneapolis, the International Code Council, an association dedicated to building safety and fire prevention in the United States, overwhelmingly backed building code changes that would make residential sprinklers mandatory in all new one- and two-family dwellings.

Our government has done the right thing with respect to high-rise residences, and I want Ontario to continue to move forward in making all businesses and buildings safer in the future.

1510

Firefighters are vital to keeping our community safe, and our government recognizes the hard work and dedication that firefighters across this province demonstrate every day. Every day across Ontario, firefighters put themselves at risk. They put themselves in harm's way to protect us. Our government recognizes that Ontario's dedicated firefighters are the backbone of safety and security within our community. Please join me in actively promoting fire prevention strategies in your communities this week.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Mr. David Oraziotti: Today I'd like to highlight an important investment that our government has made to support the economy in my community and improve health care across the province. Last week in Sault Ste. Marie, I had the honour of announcing that the McGuinty government is supporting the development of the first 3D hospital geospatial information system in northern Ontario. We've committed \$142,000 to the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre to help them with the creation of the

first system that will track disease outbreaks in real time. Hospital equipment, patients and staff will be connected to this unique technology, enabling faster and better patient safety decisions. The new system could help slow the spread of infectious diseases in a hospital, while creating a value-added product for use throughout the health care sector.

Here's what Tom Vair, the director of the innovation centre, had to say about this exciting breakthrough: "In the future, we hope that hospitals, long-term-care facilities and other health facilities will be able to use this system to help support and reduce the potential impact of future disease outbreaks." Tom and his team are a shining example of the ingenuity and creativity that is needed to ensure that Sault Ste. Marie and indeed, all Ontarians, succeed.

For our part, the McGuinty government is supporting and encouraging innovators like Tom by aggressively pursuing growing sectors of the new economy to boost local development while attracting and retaining highly skilled workers in Sault Ste. Marie and across the province.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Bill Mauro: All Canadians, including those living in Ontario, deserve to be treated equally. The federal system of taxes and programs takes more than \$20 billion from the Ontario economy every year, redistributing those funds elsewhere in the country. That means \$1,800 per Ontarian is transferred from our province to other parts of Canada.

Ontario's economy is being challenged by global economic forces and a slowing American economy. Ontario needs a true partner in the federal government. In recent years, we have made some progress—immigrants who have come to Ontario now have better access to services—but Ontario continues to be treated unfairly. Laid-off workers get \$4,600 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada. Federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario is shortchanged by \$773 million. Of the \$934 million the federal government spends for regional and economic development in Canada, only 4% is in Ontario. And under the federal government's Building Canada infrastructure fund, Ontario gets almost \$1 billion less than its fair share.

Canadians will elect a new federal government soon. One third of all the seats in Parliament will come from Ontario. We're asking Ontarians to raise the issue of fairness with all candidates. As our Premier has said, we have a rare opportunity to make our voice heard and to work together to make our province and our country prosper.

In Thunder Bay, we have seen what can be accomplished with the province and the community working together. Our government has recently made substantial

local investments totalling close to \$400 million over five years, and targeted funding for health care, seniors, innovative research, community safety, education and infrastructure projects—

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

INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Today I would like to acknowledge all the volunteers, exhibitors and visitors to this year's 2008 International Plowing Match. From September 16 to September 20, the farm of Wayne and Wendy McKague was transformed into one of the largest outdoor farming events in this country. The McKague farm is located outside of Teeswater, in the heart of Bruce county.

My colleague Carol Mitchell, the member from Huron-Bruce, and I have had the opportunity to be involved with the plowing match since 2005, when Bruce county learned they would host the IPM. Since then, over 2,000 people have volunteered in some way with the IPM, from chairing committees to stamping hands at the entrance.

At this time, I would like to mention one special volunteer: Jack Riley. Mr. Riley was the chair of the IPM and oversaw almost every aspect of this week-long event. Due to these great volunteers, over 650 exhibitors had booths or displays at the match. These booths showcased local culture and tourist attractions, farm equipment, animals and so much more. There were also over 200 competitors participating in the plowing competitions.

I had the opportunity to be at the plowing match all week and met with many of the 94,500 visitors. Highlights for me included seeing the world's longest picnic table, viewing the antique tractors, participating in the opening day parade and ceremonies and meeting all the people as they stopped by my booth to view the collection of IPM posters that I have been collecting since 1987.

Even though it rained at the beginning of the match, I am pleased to announce the Teeswater plowing match was a great success. The IPM officials are hoping to donate any profits realized to local charities in Bruce county.

Again, congratulations to Bruce county for a successful IPM.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the October 7, 2008, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 107(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

APOLOGY ACT, 2008
 LOI DE 2008 SUR
 LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Mr. Bentley moved first reading of the following bill:
 Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies / Projet de loi
 108, Loi concernant la présentation d'excuses.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Christopher Bentley: During ministerial state-
 ments.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT
 (EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR
 PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
 LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS
 (ACHAT D'APPAREILS POUR
 LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES)

Mr. Murdoch moved first reading of the following
 bill:

Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the
 purchase of equipment or devices for persons with
 disabilities / Projet de loi 109, Loi prévoyant un crédit
 d'impôt pour l'achat d'appareils ou de dispositifs pour
 les personnes handicapées.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Bill Murdoch: When I was campaigning last
 time, a year ago for the election, there didn't seem to be a
 lot for people with disabilities. This is one of the ideas
 that came up then, and I hope that everyone in the House
 will be able to support this when we debate it for second
 reading.

MASTER'S COLLEGE
 AND SEMINARY ACT, 2008

Mr. Delaney moved first reading of the following bill:
 Bill Pr10, An Act respecting Master's College and
 Seminary.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to
 standing order 85, this bill stands referred to the Standing
 Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

APOLOGY LEGISLATION
 LOI SUR LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I rise in the House today
 on behalf of the McGuinty government to introduce
 legislation that would, if passed, allow people to apolog-
 ize for a mistake or wrongdoing without fear that the
 apology would be used in lawsuits against them.

Je suis sûr que tous les députés reconnaîtront que la
 présentation d'excuses sincères après la commission d'un
 acte répréhensible ou d'une erreur est une réaction
 humaine naturelle. Cette loi contribuera à éliminer les
 obstacles juridiques à nos instincts naturels et donnera
 libre court à l'expression sincère et importante d'excuses.
 C'est la bonne chose à faire.

I am sure that all members of the House will recognize
 that a sincere apology for a wrongdoing or a mistake is a
 part of our natural human interaction. This legislation
 will help remove the legal barriers to our natural instincts
 and allow for that very important and sincere expression.
 It is the right thing to do.

Apology legislation, though, is not new to members of
 this House. Earlier this year, the member for Sault Ste.
 Marie introduced similar legislation in a private mem-
 ber's bill. David Oraziotti's private member's bill led the
 way to the government's proposed apology legislation.
 He has directed attention to a very important issue. His
 extensive research and hard work have brought us here
 today, and I'd like to acknowledge and thank him for the
 hard work that he has done in advocacy of this bill.

1520

While I'm acknowledging, let me acknowledge the
 chair of the County and District Law Presidents' Asso-
 ciation, Randall Bock, and Jamie Trimble, the presi-
 dent of the Ontario Bar Association, who are both in the
 east gallery.

Dans l'état actuel du droit, les particuliers et les organ-
 ismes hésitent peut-être à présenter des excuses pour un
 accident ou un acte répréhensible, par peur qu'elles ne
 soient utilisées comme preuve de responsabilité dans un
 procès ou d'autres procédures civiles.

Under current law, people and organizations might be
 reluctant to apologize out of fear that their words will be
 used as evidence of liability in a lawsuit and other civil
 proceedings. We know that professional organizations
 and associations sometimes advise their members not to
 apologize and not to recognize errors that may have been
 made because of the liability that is thought to go along
 with that. This reluctance to apologize harms relations
 between people. It can lead to bitterness and prolonged
 litigation. The proposed Apology Act would remove this
 legal barrier to offering apologies. It would allow in-
 dividuals and organizations, such as hospitals and other
 public institutions, to apologize for an accident or wrong-
 doing, including admitting fault, without that apology

being used as evidence of liability in a civil legal proceeding under provincial law.

The Apology Act would apply to courts, tribunals, arbitrators and other decision-making bodies. It would apply to legal proceedings under provincial law, such as civil lawsuits, administrative proceedings and professional discipline matters. It would not apply to criminal proceedings, which are federal matters, and it would not apply to prosecutions under the Provincial Offences Act. The Apology Act would not affect a victim's right to sue or their right to compensation for harm done. It would not allow a wrongdoer to escape the consequences of the incident.

Apologies have been promoted and supported in many jurisdictions as a way to reduce suffering, encourage healing and facilitate dispute resolution. Over 30 US states and most Australian states have enacted some form of apology legislation. British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in Canada have also done so.

In Ontario, we place great value on apologies. I urge the members of this assembly to join me in supporting the legislation we're introducing here today. It would give clear definition to how apologies affect liability. It would encourage the resolution of conflicts and promote healing and reconciliation. It would contribute to building a stronger, healthier and more civil society for all Ontarians. Saying "sorry" for a mistake or wrongdoing is the right thing to do.

APOLOGY LEGISLATION

Hon. David Caplan: I rise today to comment on the apology legislation just introduced by my colleague Minister Bentley. From the perspective of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, it's important that Ontario patients have all the relevant information about their health care, even in circumstances where harm has occurred. We know from discussions with patients and affected family members that they need three key pieces of information communicated to them when harm occurs as a result of health care provided. First, they need to know what happened. Second, what changes will be made to decrease the likelihood that such an event will ever happen again? And third, an apology.

The apology helps to build and re-establish rapport and trust between patients and their families and health care providers, and supports open and honest communication. As important, the apology can often aid a patient's healing both physically and psychologically. This proposed legislation promotes open, honest and timely communication between patients and their health care providers to rebuild the trust so essential to the patient-provider relationship. Openness, transparency and honesty are the foundations for achieving a culture of patient safety in Ontario, and we are working hard to reach this goal. This legislation and other important, significant actions taken by our government represent a seismic shift toward a more open relationship between patients and those they rely on to provide their care. Just

recently, we launched a new public website reporting on patient safety indicators. This initiative is part of a comprehensive plan to create an unprecedented level of transparency in Ontario's hospitals. Finally, the new amendments to regulation 965 under the Public Hospitals Act that came into effect on July 1, 2008, require hospitals to disclose critical incidents to affected patients.

In conclusion, saying "sorry" for a medical mishap or an adverse event is simply the right thing to do. With legislation in place to prevent that apology being used as evidence of liability or fault in a legal proceeding, people or organizations will be less reluctant to apologize. Then the healing can begin and the trust can be rebuilt that much sooner.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to mark Child Abuse Prevention Month in Ontario. In the month of October, the purple ribbon campaign provides an opportunity for each of us to remember our responsibility when it comes to reporting child abuse and neglect and to speak up for those who are unable to speak for themselves.

It's our moral obligation and our legal duty to promptly report any reasonable suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection as a result of abuse or neglect. When it comes to professionals who work with children, they may be subject to a penalty if they fail to report—professionals such as doctors and nurses, teachers and child care workers, coaches, club leaders and others.

Abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional. Neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to provide a child's basic needs, such as enough food, sleep, safety, supervision, clothing or medical treatment. It's important to note that one doesn't have to be certain that a child is being abused or neglected before reporting the situation to a children's aid society. If a person has reasonable grounds to believe a child is at risk, they must report their concerns immediately.

Our government takes its responsibility to children very seriously. Together with many dedicated organizations and individuals, we work very hard to serve the more than 29,000 children in the care of Ontario's children's aid societies. Together, we've been working to help more of our vulnerable children find a safe, permanent home, we've strengthened our child protection laws to create more options for children in the care of children's aid societies to be placed in a permanent home, and we've introduced changes to make Ontario's children's aid societies more accountable and sustainable so they will be there for children who need them in years to come.

We took another important step when we recently announced that, effective this past July, children and youth in care will benefit from funding equivalent to the Ontario child benefit. These funds will be flowed through children's aid societies to provide supports that include

tutoring, skills building and recreational activities, as well as to establish and build savings programs for older youths to access when they leave care.

As the Minister of Children and Youth Services, I'm passionate about seeing that every young person has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential, especially for some of the most vulnerable kids in Ontario. This initiative is another way we're providing more opportunities for these kids and lessening the risk that they may experience poverty later in life.

As citizens, we must be on the lookout at all times for signs of abuse and neglect and just as vigilant in reporting them. Last year, with the help of teachers, health professionals, neighbours, social workers and police officers, Ontario's children's aid societies handled more than 160,000 calls about child protection concerns. By working together, we can put an end to child abuse. That's why last week, I asked for unanimous consent for the members to wear a purple ribbon this month to create awareness of this crucial issue, and I'm asking all Ontarians today and every day to stand up and speak out on behalf of abused children. It is our opportunity to use our voices to protect the safety and innocence that every child deserves, to give these kids every opportunity for a better future.

1530

APOLOGY LEGISLATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today and speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus regarding the Apology Act. I addressed this issue at some length in May when it was first presented as private member's Bill 59 by the member from Sault Ste. Marie. I supported the bill in principle then, and I'll continue to do so, but I do have a number of reservations.

On the face of it, the act is quite simple and straightforward. I certainly do agree that by introducing such legislation, an opportunity is provided for parties to resolve disputes without having to go to court. This of course would seem to be beneficial for all, adding the possibility of saving money, time and much distress. However, there is a contrary view and I need to express that here. I would again like to refer to a paper written by Benjamin Bathgate and Joseph C. D'Angelo called *Better Safe Than Sorry? The Role of Apologies in Litigation*. The authors, both lawyers, raise the possibility that legislation such as this could provide for a kind of trivialization of apologies: "Another concern is that apologies can become trivialized and meaningless if the defendant knows that they will not be admissible and the mere act of apologizing could either prevent a lawsuit from being commenced, or reduce the amount of potential damages for which the defendant is liable."

The answer to this concern is that (a) human nature being what it is, if the defendant truly believes he has done nothing wrong, he is unlikely to apologize; and (b) if the plaintiff believes the apology is insincere, he is unlikely to accept it.

So there is a real concern here that we could end up with a boilerplate apology that would lack any real significance. When an apology is presented merely with the hope of reducing an unwanted result, it takes away the humanity of the premise upon which the bill was introduced in the first place.

Furthermore, the bill states that an apology will not be admissible in a civil action as an admission of liability nor will it void a policy of insurance. But what about a situation such as a serious motor vehicle accident, for example, which could give rise to both a civil action and criminal charges being laid? If an apology is rendered, theoretically, it can be admissible in the criminal proceeding leading to a conviction. The criminal conviction could then be entered into the subsequent civil action and therefore have the effect of providing an inadvertent admission of liability as well as voiding the contract of insurance rendering the defendant personally liable for damages.

So what seems to be very straightforward and simple on the face of it, can have unintended consequences. That's why we in the PC caucus would urge the government to get this bill into committee and travel on it so that we can gain the benefit of the many interested parties who may wish to have some comments on this bill and we can have some direct knowledge of the possible ramifications of legislation such as this.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am pleased to stand up on behalf of the PC caucus to respond regarding child abuse awareness month. Sadly, this is a necessity. But it is a necessity and so we must address it. Every Ontarian has a responsibility to be aware of and report child abuse. That's the law. When a child is denied the basic necessities of life, that is abuse—plain and simple. One quarter of all Canadian children are victims of abuse or neglect before they turn the age of 16.

The McGuinty government must find out where the gaps are in our system that allowed Katelynn Sampson to be murdered. How was she allowed to be placed with a couple with criminal convictions, something that could be traced? Why did no one notice she didn't come to school for weeks and weeks? The death of Katelynn is the ultimate symbol of our failure as a society and a government to protect every child. If we cannot protect children like Katelynn, how can we protect anyone? We all have to do better.

APOLOGY LEGISLATION

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. New Democrats are very, very cautious about the government's Apology Act—not that this government doesn't have a whole lot to apologize for to workers across this province. But let's understand what this legislation does. It doesn't simply bar the apology, the "I'm sorry," from

being an admission of guilt but would bar an outright admission of liability or responsibility.

It's one thing to go up to a pedestrian who has been mowed down, lying on the road bleeding and bones broken, and say, "I'm sorry." One can be sorry about their condition without having been in any way responsible for their being in that condition. But it's another thing to say, "I'm sorry that I've been drinking far too much and that I went through that red light and that I was speeding." Innocent victims have a difficult enough time in the system as it is, fighting insurance companies and high-priced defence lawyers, without being denied the opportunity to use a clear admission of responsibility, liability, in the course of pursuing justice.

Let's also understand what the motivation is here. The sponsors of this legislation are the big insurance companies including, in no small way, the self-insurers of the medical profession. They have a strong interest in this legislation because it's designed to blunt or dull the effectiveness of a plaintiff's case. The mediation industry, which all too often recommends apologies—sincere or insincere—in an effort to accelerate the settlement process will now have one less hurdle.

New Democrats are sticking with innocent victims on this one. And I tell you, my colleagues in the OBA had better come forward with more than a few plaintiffs' lawyers supporting this, the people who fight for innocent accident victims, if they expect anything less than some uphill battle when it comes to the opposition party here at Queen's Park.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to respond to the child abuse statement by the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and I have to say that we would agree completely, given the reality of the sickening situation in Ontario where children are facing abuse in many situations, in many instances. In fact, we've seen what has happened over the last couple of years and the tragedies in young lives like that of Katelynn Sampson, the stabbing murder of Jared Osidacz, and the physical abuse and complete neglect in the death of young Randal Dooley. All of these things are sickening, sickening tragedies in the province of Ontario, and I think everyone would agree.

In fact, the minister talked in her remarks about raising our voices and making sure that situations of abuse are brought to the attention of the proper authorities. I have to say my colleague Peter Kormos, the member for Welland, and myself have raised our voices, and we've asked the Ombudsman to look into what it was that failed the young Katelynn Sampson, how she was able to be put at risk and ended up losing her life in the system in Ontario that was supposed to be caring for her when she was in a vulnerable situation.

The reality is that there are many situations in Ontario that put children at risk, and that the abuse of children can be pointed to many, many things, and this government has control and responsibility over some of those

things. In the minister's statement she talked about things like making sure children have enough food. How are children going to have enough food if their parents are living in dire poverty? How are they going to have enough food if their parents are being laid off because there are no jobs or there are no jobs to go to that pay a decent wage in this province? How are children going to have enough food if this government doesn't start acting on the poverty that we have in this province?

The minister also talked about clothing in her statement. She talked about the need for children to have proper clothing. They cut the clothing allowance for children for back to school. What is their excuse for that kind of abuse of children in our communities? That's what I want to know.

You know, the reality is that the government has a lot of responsibility when it comes to some of the root causes of the abuse that occurs against children in our communities. They can take some responsibility. They have to move on issues like poverty. All you have to do is look at reports coming out of the University of Western Ontario a couple years ago that tied very clearly the increasing poverty rates with the increasing caseloads of children's aid societies. The minister is shaking her head. Yes, it's true, she knows that it's true, and that's why it's even more incumbent upon them to deal not only with child poverty but with the poverty of families in this province, because the reality is that much of the pain and anguish that children face is because of their circumstances, and the circumstances are not being dealt with by this government.

DEFERRED VOTES

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 86. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1540 to 1545.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members please take their seats.

Mr. McMeekin has moved government notice of motion number 86. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dhillon, Vic	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Dickson, Joe	Murdoch, Bill
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bentley, Christopher	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Carroll, Aileen	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	McMeekin, Ted	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hillier, Randy	Prue, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 20.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The ayes being 45 and the nays being 20, I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will remind the members that this motion that has just passed takes effect at midnight this Friday, and remind the members then that they will be returning to the House next Wednesday at 9 a.m.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Nine a.m. According to the new standing orders that were passed, it's 9 a.m. on Wednesday.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Newmarket–Aurora has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given yesterday by the Minister of Labour concerning the regulatory burden on small and medium-sized employers. This matter will be debated today at 5:45 p.m.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to ask the House for unanimous consent for members to wear a ribbon in celebration of World Animal Week, which runs from October 4 to October 10.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

1550

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL WELFARE ACT, 2008

LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008 SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Mr. Bartolucci moved third 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): Further debate?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I stand today in support of Bill 50, a bill I am proud to have introduced that proposes to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

This week is World Animal Week, an important time for all who are dedicated to the care and welfare of animals. Mahatma Gandhi probably said it best when he said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." The aim of this legislation is simple: to better protect Ontario's animals from mistreatment and abuse, and to greatly improve the way our animals are treated.

Currently, Ontario is in last place in Canada when it comes to animal protection legislation. If passed, Bill 50 will ensure we go from worst to first. The OSPCA Act, as it currently stands, has been in effect for 90 years. Back then, the First World War had just ended and the welfare of both animals and children were the responsibility of the humane society. Over these years, the OSPCA Act has helped protect many animals. But in too many cases, it has not allowed the extra steps to be taken that are needed to protect them the best.

It is wrong, for example, that exotic species are confined in roadside zoo enclosures that are too small and not properly secured. This is a concern for both animal welfare and for community safety. The proposed legislation would help rectify this concern; if passed, it would modernize and strengthen the act, setting the standard for animal protection laws in Canada. It would support the people who protect and care for animals and deal appropriately with those who abuse them.

I will mention this later on, but in the gallery today we have many of the partners that we worked with in drafting this legislation. I want to say, publicly, thank you to them, to the members of the opposition and to the general public who have spent considerable time debating this bill and working on this bill. Thank you so much. It will help ensure that all animals, whether they are kept as pets or in a zoo or elsewhere, are treated with the care and respect that all living creatures deserve.

There is wide agreement on the need for this stronger stand. Our government developed this legislation in consultation with several concerned groups, including the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association and others. Our government is fortunate to have their considerable knowledge and expertise to guide us as we take action to crack down on animal abuse.

Members from all parties in this House have also spoken to the need to improve Ontario's animal welfare laws. Again, I particularly note the efforts of the member from Willowdale, David Zimmer, and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, Mike Colle, for their incredible

advocacy; the member from York–Simcoe, Julia Munro; and the Leeds–Grenville member, Bob Runciman, for their commitment to animals. All of these above people have been very, very forceful advocates and we appreciate their input.

Let me remind the House of the legislation's key components. If passed, this act would allow the courts to bring tougher penalties against people who are cruel to animals. And at the end of the day, isn't this what the legislation is all about? Isn't that the way it should be? Isn't that a way the society that is caring operates? This protection would include jail time of up to two years, fines of up to \$60,000 and a lifetime ban on ownership—severe, yes; necessary, yes. It would require veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect and protect them from personal liability for doing so. It would allow the OSPCA to inspect places where animals are kept for entertainment, exhibition, board, sale or hire, including roadside zoos, circuses and pet stores. The aim would be to ensure that the animals are receiving basic standards of care. The act would also make it a provincial offence to cause distress to an animal, train an animal to fight another animal, or harm law enforcement animals such as police dogs or horses.

As you are aware, Bill 50 was put before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy over the course of last summer. I would like to thank the committee members for their hard work and thoughtful consideration of the bill. The committee conducted public hearings in Toronto, London and Ottawa, and reviewed dozens of written submissions from stakeholders and individuals from across the province. I want to thank everyone who offered their thoughts. It is important to get the input from Ontarians. It is important to ensure that we have encapsulated in this bill that which is important to the people of Ontario. The prevailing opinion was that the proposed legislation is both practical and timely.

As one example, Shelagh MacDonald from the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies said that Bill 50 “makes many necessary changes to bring Ontario's animal protection law into the 21st century and in line with most other provinces.... There's nothing radical in this bill and nothing that will threaten any lawful uses of animals carried out according to normal practices”—very, very important insights that we should remember as we debate third reading of this bill.

As legislators, we invest a lot of time in the nuts and bolts of legislation. That's our job. For a few moments, though, I would like to tell this House and the people who are watching about some recent examples of animal abuse and how this bill would result in more positive outcomes for our animal friends and those who care for them.

Let me talk about Tyson the kangaroo for a second. An Australian tourist raised legitimate concerns that a kangaroo was being kept in a very small cage at a London-area zoo. Under current laws, the OSPCA could not act on these concerns since the information was not current enough to get a search warrant and they could not

observe the animal in immediate distress. Under our new law, the OSPCA could inspect any zoo or enter without a warrant, based upon reasonable grounds to believe that the animal was in immediate distress.

Let me give you the example of AK the puppy. AK is a mixed-breed puppy from Windsor who had his ears crudely cropped. Think about that—your animal having his ears very, very crudely cropped. Under current laws, the OSPCA could only prosecute under the Criminal Code. As a result, they had to determine who had cropped the puppy's ears and whether the harm done was wilful, as required under the Criminal Code. Under our new law, the OSPCA will only need to determine the owner of the animal and that the mutilation occurred, period. The OSPCA could charge the owner with the offence of causing and permitting distress to an animal. The provincial penalties include the possibility of a lifetime ownership ban.

1600

I want to spend a few moments telling you the story of an escaped jaguar. The Bracebridge police were forced to shoot a jaguar dead when it escaped from its cage at an area zoo, but not before the jaguar killed the zoo owner's dog. The Ministry of Natural Resources had revoked the zoo's licence and removed native species from the zoo, but under the current law it had no jurisdiction over the jaguar. In addition, the OSPCA had no information that the animal was in distress or that it posed a danger to others and, ultimately, to itself by being kept in a cage from which it could escape.

We must ensure that no zoo in the province of Ontario can be a rogue zoo, and Bill 50 does this. Under the new law, the OSPCA could inspect and determine whether prescribed standards of care were met, including, potentially, whether the jaguar's cage was sufficient, and then take appropriate action.

I think we all read the story of selling rabid puppies at a Toronto flea market. Remember when puppies infected with rabies were freely sold at a flea market in Toronto? Under current laws, the OSPCA had no information that these puppies were in distress and had no other ability to inspect their condition. Under our new law, the OSPCA would have the ability to inspect any premises where animals are sold and could have detected the animals' health issues earlier on. This would have helped them to find the source of the rabid puppies sooner and this public health incident could have been averted.

Let's talk about dogs left in cars. It seems that the arrival of the first summer heat wave coincides with another tragic report of a dog being left in a car. Each summer, the OSPCA deals with numerous public complaints about dogs being left in vehicles, often suffering from heat and dehydration. Under current laws, the OSPCA can respond, but must be able to observe the animal in immediate distress before taking action. If the animal is not visible—say it was locked in the trunk or it was trying to seek comfort under a seat, behind heavily tinted glass or in the cab of a pickup truck—they would have to obtain a search warrant. A lot of valuable time

would have elapsed and some great harm could have been done to that animal.

Under the new law, if passed, the OSPCA could take immediate action with reasonable grounds to believe the animal was in immediate distress. For example, where an OSPCA investigator could hear the animal in distress or the person making the complaint had seen the animal in distress prior to the arrival of the inspector, the OSPCA could take immediate action.

These examples highlight the serious flaws in the existing laws and how Bill 50 will make Ontario's animal protection laws the strongest in Canada. It is a law for Tyson; it is a law for AK; it is a law for all animals large and small and those who care for them.

The committee process did inspire amendments to the bill that I believe make a strong proposal even stronger. Let me relay them to the House.

Originally, the act proposed that only the OSPCA or its affiliates would be able to use the name "humane society" or "SPCA." This was suggested as a way of helping the police and public more easily identify the local groups that had OSPCA Act authority. We've now added a grandfathering clause to that proposition. This would ensure that affiliates that existed in Ontario when the legislation was first introduced in April 2008 could continue to use their name even if they were disaffiliated with the OSPCA in the future.

This change would also ensure that the hundreds of animal shelters and rescue groups that operate across the province could continue to do their own good work without needing to be affiliated with the OSPCA.

At the suggestion of our committee members in opposition, we've added two new points to the legislation. Bill 50 now proposes that it be a provincial offence to knowingly make a false complaint to the OSPCA with respect to an animal being in distress. Further, if a person was convicted of an animal cruelty offence, the court could order that person to undergo counselling or training. We have also clarified the process through which the OSPCA could retain a seized animal for its own protection.

As an additional point, I would like to reiterate that Bill 50, if passed, would not affect the activities of any law-abiding hunter, farmer, angler or trapper. These activities have long been governed by other legislation and processes, and practices that are currently legal would remain legal under our proposed bill. In fact, we have ensured that the clauses that cite the exception of the agricultural, fishing and hunting sectors are in the main body of the bill.

If passed, Bill 50 would not expand the mandate of the OSPCA. It would, however, give this fine organization more effective tools to conduct its important work and help ensure the well-being of the animals of this province.

It's a long-overdue step that builds on other steps our government has already taken. These include investing \$5 million to improve and modernize OSPCA infrastructure across the province, more than quadrupling

funds for the OSPCA to \$500,000 each year to ensure that all inspectors and agents have access to top-quality training, and providing \$100,000 to support the cost of OSPCA zoo inspection training and the first round of zoo inspections.

There is a statistic that I have long found troubling. The OSPCA investigates about 17,000 allegations of animal cruelty each year. That's at least 17,000 calls made every year by concerned Ontarians who are reporting suspected cases of abuse. I find that appalling, and I find the need for updated legislation to be essential. It's vital that these calls are made, and I commend all those individuals who are aware and concerned and are raising the red flags. I commend the OSPCA investigators, staff and volunteers who answer these calls and are so committed to the care of these animals.

But this statistic also rams home an unmistakable fact: that there are thousands of innocent animals out there that are suffering or in pain or living in deplorable conditions. They cannot speak for themselves; they rely on us. We have the opportunity through this proposed legislation to put tougher laws in place so that animals can be quickly and efficiently rescued from an often horrifying situation, so that the people who treat them with such cruelty are penalized and so that any animal that has been abused, whether it be a cat, a horse, a dog or a kangaroo in a roadside zoo, is given the second chance it deserves for a safe, healthy, good life.

I urge all members to join me in support of Bill 50.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pre-empting the remarks, questions and comments from my colleague, Mr. Miller from Parry Sound-Muskoka, but I just want to say a thank you to the minister. I thought his remarks were bang on. I know there were some controversial parts of this bill. I've come to understand the warrantless entry parts, and I thought your examples, Minister, were quite good in terms of the dog you can't see. The only disturbing thought I had was, I was appearing before the Grey county council a few weeks ago, and they had had a meeting with—I don't know if it was you, Minister, or your staff, but they were under the impression that warrantless entry was already there, and I had to explain to them that, yes, but that the officer or someone had to see the animal under distress. So that was a bit inaccurate and made me look like I didn't know what was in the bill, and I said, "I do know what's in the bill. I've been around here for a few years." But congratulations on updating. It has been almost 90 years and it certainly needed to be updated.

The largest number—almost the second largest—of calls I've ever had as an MPP over the 18 years was when the German shepherd was dragged behind the pick-up truck, and when you consider children are murdered and bad things happen every day, people don't call about that, but they sure call when an animal is in distress. They want the laws changed and they want tougher laws

than what was in the Criminal Code, and these are tougher laws. You can go to jail now for two years; there are higher fines and more authority given to the OSPCA officers.

I want to vote for this—the second-largest number of e-mails and calls that we got was probably more recently, in more recent months, when the dog's ears were clipped and it was left to basically rot in the heat out on the balcony. Thank God somebody went and rescued that dog and noticed it was in distress. And all to make the dog look meaner, which is just sick—sick people.

I've always said that people who mistreat their animals should be treated harshly and it should be taken as a serious crime. I want to thank Lori Grey of Alliston from the Dog Legislation Council of Canada for all of her advice on this and other legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say quickly that I'm going to support this legislation. There were a number of issues with this bill at the beginning that, by and large, have been addressed, but there are still a few things that I think we need to put on the record, and I'm sure our critic, Cheri DiNovo, when she's back, will do so. But I want to say to the minister that at least it's a step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 50. First of all, let me congratulate Minister Bartolucci for his leadership in this particular legislation and making sure that we do create one of the toughest laws, in terms of the protection of our animals, in the province of Ontario. So congratulations to the minister and his staff for doing excellent work in putting forward this legislation.

I received a lot of correspondence in my community office in the riding of Ottawa Centre on Bill 50. The majority of the people who wrote to me were in support of this legislation. One of the concerns, however, that they did raise is the so-called section 6, which talked about the affiliation of humane societies with the OSPCA. I'm really happy to see that during the committee process, that issue was looked at and the legislation, as it sits at third reading, has been amended, by which all humane societies which were affiliated with the OSPCA on the date when this legislation was introduced are now grandfathered. That includes the Toronto Humane Society, or other humane societies in London, Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo.

That concern has been met, which further strengthens this legislation, so I'm really happy to see that the concerns of my constituents were taken into account when this legislation was being reviewed by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and that those changes have been made because we, as the minister aptly pointed out, have to ensure that we create laws to ensure that animals

are fully protected, that cruelty to animals cannot be tolerated.

I'm very proud to support this legislation to ensure that Ontario is on the forefront in protecting animals within our society and within our communities, because that's a responsibility for us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the minister on Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. As has been mentioned, it was 1919 when this act was last updated, so it's certainly high time that some changes were made.

This is now third reading. We had five days of public hearings. I know the member from Simcoe North has worked hard on that, and he's going to do our leadoff for third reading shortly. I know that he proposed some 28 amendments. Unfortunately, only three of them were accepted, but sometimes, for the opposition, that's not too bad.

The minister mentioned an incident that happened within my riding, in Bracebridge, where the OPP were called in to what I would call a roadside zoo and shot a jaguar after it had already killed the dog of the owner of this zoo. So I think that we do need to make some changes to bring in standards of care, particularly for some of these roadside zoos, but for all animals.

I still have some concerns to do with warrantless entry and also to do with the training of the OSPCA officers. They should be properly trained in terms of the inspections that they will be doing. They're going to have powers equivalent to a police officer, so they should at the very least have similar training for the work that they will be doing.

I know that PC members Bob Runciman from Leeds-Grenville and Julia Munro from York-Simcoe both brought private members' bills forward in the past to do with this same area, and I think this bill has built on those private members' bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return now to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, who has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the members from Simcoe-Grey, Timmins-James Bay, Ottawa Centre and Parry Sound-Muskoka for their kind comments.

I too want to reinforce that the member from Willowdale, David Zimmer; the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, Mike Colle; the member for York-Simcoe, Julia Munro; and the member for Leeds-Grenville, Bob Runciman, have been very forceful advocates, and I thank them.

As well, I thank the partners in the protection of animal welfare, who are here today. I want to thank them for their wisdom, their guidance and their incredible advocacy. As you see, there looks to be some type of consensus with regard to legislation. I believe that's in place because everyone on both sides of the House, the public at large, and the advocates and partners in animal

welfare worked in a very, very unique partnership to try to get over some of the hurdles that people found originally in this legislation. I guess that's the strength of democracy and that's the strength of the process we use to pass bills.

At the same time, there may be people, at the end of this process, who aren't completely satisfied. Again, given, that is the democratic process. But one thing for sure that we can say categorically is that the protection of animals will be strengthened. We will have moved from worst to first—

Mr. Mike Colle: Ontario's a safer place.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci:—and it couldn't and wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the combined efforts of everyone. As my fellow member from Eglinton–Lawrence says, this wouldn't have been possible without the help of everyone, and Ontario is a safer place for our animals because of your efforts. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very, very pleased to respond today to the third reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The short title is the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008. There have been amendments over the years, but it's been the most significant change since 1919.

1620

I was pleased with the fact that we travelled this bill fairly significantly, with two days of hearings here in Toronto, a day in London, a day in Ottawa—and we had one other day. I can't remember where it was now; there have been so many things happening in the course of the summer.

There has been a lot of head-butting on animal welfare in organizations. There is no question we've got issues on this bill that we still have to deal with, and I'm going to point some of those out. A lot of it involves regulation and leadership from this House as we move forward in the future. I think the minister summed it up properly when he said that no matter what happens, if you strengthen legislation to protect animals that are in distress, in the end you've made a good move towards making society better for animals.

Mr. Wilson, the member for Simcoe–Grey, mentioned in his comments the types of responses he's had from the general public, with the e-mails and letters. I recall that, in my time here at Queen's Park, the most correspondence I had ever received was on the pit bull legislation—by far. I think I ended up with correspondence a foot high, letters and e-mails, very, very concerned about the legislation. A lot of those same people have responded over the course of the last few months, but not as many. Many, many people have concerns.

I really do think that when we deal with the ministry staff, when we deal with the parliamentary assistant, Mr. Levac, who led the bill through the committee hearings, and the office of the Ministry of Community Safety and

Correctional Services, and all the people who came out, we're better off today than we were when the bill was introduced, but there's no question that we still have things to do.

In my riding of Simcoe North, I have two OSPCA branches. Both are fairly new. One is a brand new place, because it was destroyed by fire a year ago, and it just opened up in July, about the time these hearings were going on. The second one is in Orillia.

My office is continually involved with fundraising activities for the OSPCA branches. I know they do a dog walk in May at both branches. They do calendars, gala evenings, silent auctions, all these kinds of things, because they do get a lot of interest from the community.

Most people are really concerned about what happens when animals are in distress, and most people want tougher penalties. We talked about—I'm sorry about not mentioning all their ridings, because I don't really recall them—the private members' bills of Ms. Munro, Mr. Runciman, Mr. Zimmer and Mr. Colle in the past, and they all tried to do better things for animals in distress. That's why we end up with a somewhat better piece of legislation.

I'm going to repeat some of the things I said in my leadoff on second reading and read some notes and comments, because I think they should be put on the record.

I want to talk, first of all, about roadside zoos, because that's where this came from. I was so pleased to see that Ms. Tkachyk is here today from WSPA. They were a lead organization in this. We all thought from day one that we would be regulating roadside zoos. And let's face it: That's something that I think needed to be done; it needed to be complete.

First of all, there were no regulations around licensing, and again, I'm going to bring out some points here that there is more to be done on that as well—but things like the amount of water, the shelter, the heat, making sure that they were properly regulated, have to go into the hands of OSPCA, and I'm glad to see that is actually happening.

But not everybody lives near a big zoo. There is still a need for roadside zoos, and I hope people don't want them demolished and taken away.

I'll give you an example. Last Wednesday night, I had to go to an event in Elmvale, and I had my three little granddaughters with me. They can all read now, and they saw the sign for the Elmvale zoo, which is an old, established zoo in Mr. Wilson's riding, Simcoe–Grey, right outside of Elmvale. So I went to this event and I took them out to dinner after, and then after that they said, "Can we go see where that zoo is?" We drove out to the zoo, and it was getting to be almost dusk at that time, but you could still see the giraffes and the buffalo. There are quite a few animals outside in these big fields. The littlest one, Madison, said, "I've been here. My kindergarten class came here last year," and she started naming all the animals off and what they were doing. From that perspective, there are three little girls who wouldn't normally go off to the Toronto Zoo or maybe even

MarineLand, but a lot of people, a lot of families, a lot of school classes have gone to these smaller roadside zoos. If they're going to be in existence, we want them to be well run, well organized, and the animals cared for in a proper manner, because they do have a purpose. I can tell you, the roadside zoo that I'm closest to is the one in Elmvale, and it doesn't matter when you go by there—it's on Highway 27; you can always find large crowds of people at it. I'm in favour, if we're going to have roadside zoos, of making sure they are well run, because they can be an asset to your community as well.

On the roadside zoos, there are things I wanted to make sure that we put on the record, because there are some writing campaigns going on that will make a difference when we get to the final drafting of the regulations, and hopefully when these things are put on the record here in Hansard at third reading, people will in fact listen to them. But there's one going out to the minister right now. I believe it is an e-mail that's being sent around the province, and it's to Minister Bartolucci, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

"Dear Minister:

"Thank you for recognizing that animal welfare matters to Ontarians by introducing the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"I appreciate the government's efforts to improve Ontario's laws for the prevention of cruelty to animals. I remain concerned, however, that this will not sufficiently address the problems at roadside zoos unless licensing and standards for the keeping of captive wildlife are included in the regulations which accompany the new law.

"Wild animals such as kangaroos, tigers and monkeys have very different physical and behavioural needs that are challenging to provide for in captivity. Special regulations and standards for captive wildlife are needed to ensure these animals are kept safely and humanely.

"Ontario is the only province that does not license keeping exotic wildlife and does not require zoos to meet public health and safety regulations. It's far too easy for people to acquire tigers and monkeys and keep them in small, ramshackle cages. Captive wildlife should be protected, and anyone who wishes to keep these animals should be licensed and required by law to comply with professional animal welfare and public safety standards.

"I feel that if the government includes standards for captive wildlife in the regulations under Bill 50, it will truly bring Ontario from 'worst to first' in animal protection."

That's signed by a young lady from Guelph, Ontario.

I believe the minister will see a lot of these e-mails, and I hope that when they are drafting regulations and making this legislation complete, they will listen to these kinds of concerns.

Now, I've also got some comments that I received from the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and I want to read that on the record as well today, along with some other things. I don't want to take the whole

hour, but I know I'm starting to take quite a bit of time. This was just recently put out:

"An open letter to Ontario members of provincial Parliament regarding the need for captive wildlife regulations and standards under Bill 50.

"Dear members of provincial Parliament:

"The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is pleased to submit recommendations for animal welfare standards that could be implemented through the regulations accompanying Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act. These recommendations were submitted to the provincial animal welfare working group that is being facilitated by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. We would like to also share our recommendations with all MPPs."

I'm putting it on the record in the House today in case people haven't seen this letter, because we're trying to make this bill, as we said, from worst to first.

1630

"In order to address Ontario's roadside zoo problem, it is of paramount importance that along with general standards of care for all animals, the regulations should lay out further requirements that will apply to captive wildlife facilities.

"We are pleased to receive from the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Honourable Rick Bartolucci, a letter reiterating the government's commitment to establish standards of care for zoo animals in the regulations accompanying the act. We appreciate this commitment, but we want to make sure these standards are comprehensive enough to address the welfare requirements of wildlife in captivity. Wild animals have very different physical and behavioural needs that are challenging to provide for in captivity. Special standards for their care must be established.

"We also continue to encourage the provincial government to implement a zoo licensing regime to ensure that zoos are proactively encouraged to reach these standards as a condition of receiving their annual licence. Ontario is one of the very few provinces that does not regulate zoos and license the keeping of wildlife. (Ontario currently licenses only the keeping of native wildlife in zoos; however, there are a few conditions attached to the licence. No licence is required to keep exotic wildlife such as tigers, monkeys or kangaroos.) Most other jurisdictions have also established basic welfare and public safety standards that zoos and other facilities must comply with. It's time for Ontario to follow suit, and Bill 50 provides the perfect opportunity to bring about these necessary changes. We believe this will truly move Ontario from a position of worst to first in animal protection."

And that's from the actual World Society for the Protection of Animals. I'm not going to go through all the standards of care that they are suggesting, but certainly, in further debate on this bill, someone else may want to add some of these. I'm looking over at the minister, asking—obviously, licensing is a very important part of the regulations, and it's mentioned quite frequently in the

debate, but also when we get to deciding the final regulations.

One of the reasons—when we talk about regulations—I was so concerned prior to the committee hearing, and prior to even second reading debate, is that we had the opportunity to bring in as many people as possible, experts in this field, for example, people concerned with agriculture, people concerned with hunting and fishing regulations, to make sure that they had full input so that their concerns were addressed and we had done it properly.

I have a little bit more on roadside zoos that I wanted to add in. I did want to mention that when we debated this bill, originally the bill was hailed in the press releases and in the media. We heard all the different stories come out in the media, and it was hailed as a roadside zoo bill. I keep bringing this up to the ministry and the ministry staff. The fact of the matter is, we brag about that. However, in the actual legislation—and this is on record a number of times now—the word “zoo” is not mentioned. The actual word “zoo” is not mentioned in the bill. It will be, apparently, in the regulations. But it’s kind of funny; I felt that people were looking for this roadside zoo bill. I looked at every sentence in the bill and in the appendix etc. and couldn’t find it mentioned.

While I was talking about the OSPCA, I wanted to put a few things on the record. These are things I didn’t hear the minister point out which I thought might be interesting to put on the record concerning the OSPCA. In Ontario, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is a provincially funded charity that enforces animal welfare laws, and I think that people have to know that they’ve got two roles. They are getting funding from the province, but as I mentioned earlier, there are a lot of fundraising activities taking place, so they have kind of a dual role here, which has been pointed out a number of times in the legislation when we were doing committee hearings and in debate. There is a bit of a conflict when you’re a charity but you’re also sort of the policing authority. That is an issue, and I think that that will continue on as we move forward. I don’t think we’ve heard the end of that particular role, and there may be a way to correct that in the future. However, it’s something that I just wanted to point out that we heard over and over again in the committee hearings, and there are still e-mails and letters flowing in today as a result of that.

The Criminal Code of Canada and municipal bylaws also have provisions for animal welfare. In 2008, the Liberal government introduced Bill 50 to amend the OSPCA Act. While there is broad-based support for animal welfare, this act was controversial for a number of reasons. What I wanted to point out is—this is what is in the legislative library on the OSPCA. It says, “The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ... is tasked with enforcing most important animal welfare laws in the province. Each year, inspectors with the OSPCA respond to approximately 15,000 allegations of cruelty to animals. In addition, the OSPCA cares for and shelters tens of thousands of animals that have been

neglected, abused or abandoned. The province of Ontario provides annual funding to the OSPCA in the amount of \$500,000. In addition to the annual grant, in recent years, the OSPCA has received additional grants to assist it in its investigation of suspected puppy and kitten mills, its inspections of roadside zoos, and a one-time capital grant of \$5 million to upgrade OSPCA facilities and computer systems and improve services in northern communities. However, the OSPCA is responsible for raising most of the funds required to cover the costs of its operations, including its inspections and animal care programs; in 2007, funding by the Ontario government accounted for less than 6% of the revenues of the OSPCA.”

So, again, when I say we have these branches across Ontario and their affiliates, the fundraising is a very, very important part of that, and they still of course have the policing authority as well.

“The Criminal Code prohibits persons from killing or injuring animals without lawful excuse, or causing unnecessary suffering to an animal. Until recently, these provisions had not undergone substantive revision since the introduction of the Criminal Code in 1892. Bill S-203, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals) significantly increased the penalties for contravening the provisions of the Criminal Code relating to animal welfare. Critics of Bill S-203 have argued, however, that the bill failed to accomplish the significant reforms needed to modernize the animal welfare provisions of the Criminal Code. Animal welfare offences under the Criminal Code are dealt with in the context of crimes against property, rather than crimes against sentient, living beings capable of feeling pain. As a result, critics charge that the Criminal Code provisions, as amended by Bill S-203, do not adequately protect wild or stray animals.” I wanted to bring those legislative library definitions into it because I thought it was something that also would be important to bring about.

As I mentioned earlier, we had a number of organizations that visited the committee hearings and made deputations. Many of them, of course, were opposed to section 6, and we’ve made somewhat of a correction on that. We had organizations like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Farm Animal Council, a number of veterinary organizations, a number of animal welfare organizations. We had a number of individual stories that were told, people who had been charged or had their animals taken away by the OSPCA. Of course, those were very emotional examples. People came forward with those, and in some cases they were very, very difficult for the people to explain, because they felt they had been improperly treated. However, we have to move forward. The example we’re using here, or what we continue to say, is that we need better and better training for our inspectors. I’ve been told that that’s the direction we will be going and that’s the direction the ministry feels is appropriate as well.

1640

One group that has been very adamant recently is the Ontario Farm Animal Council. They have some issues

they wanted to bring forward, and I wanted to put them on the record as well, because I felt that they had made some good deputations, some good recommendations, in their presentations to the committee. They sort of worked in tandem with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I'll read the most recent letter I received, because they know that Bill 50 is coming up for third reading, and I wanted to read this letter from the Ontario Farm Animal Council. It reads:

"Dear Minister Bartolucci,

"This letter is a follow-up to our letters of May 9 and May 27, 2008. The Ontario Farm Animal Council appreciates the justice policy committee for making the hearing process on Bill 50 accessible to those across the province.

"The series of July hearings made it possible for OFAC and many others to provide recommendations to your government for improving the OSPCA Act. The OFAC recommendations, which were sent to you directly, have been developed with the best interests of animals, animal owners and enforcement agencies in mind.

"Most presenters, regardless of their affiliations, also recommended many of these same improvements. It was therefore surprising to learn that, despite such consensus, these improvements will not be included for consideration when the bill returns for third and final reading.

"Although several amendments introduced by the committee's PC members would have addressed many of the repeated recommendations made by the committee presenters, all but two were turned down." Those are the amendments that we talked about a little earlier.

"We feel strongly that changes are still required to address the needs of farm animals and the concerns of Ontario's farmers and food producers. It is our belief that recommendations that are the best for animals should be accepted regardless of what party proposes them.

"We would therefore ask that your government introduce further improvements to the bill at third reading, and that these include:

"(1) oversight and accountability of the OSPCA and Animal Care Review Board,

"(2) clarification of the warrantless entry provision

"[3] and, a revision to section 21 that would establish the OSPCA Act as a provincial standard in order to ensure consistency across the province.

"We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the legislation and the necessity for further amendments prior to third reading."

And that's signed by the chair, John Maaskant, on behalf of the Ontario Farm Animal Council. He's the chairman of that board.

Again, we have people who thought that the committee process worked fairly well; however, they still have some recommendations that they wish would be implemented and corrected.

We've also got some issues from the chairman of the Humane Society of Canada—they made some very eloquent deputations at the committee hearings. The most

recent request, as recently as September 29—we've had a bunch of these come in just in the last week or so, but I want to put it on the record too. This is from Michael O'Sullivan, chair and CEO of the Humane Society of Canada. It was a letter addressed to the parliamentary assistant, Mr. Levac:

"The Clerk of the Legislature has finally released a copy of the written document submitted to the committee.

"As parliamentary assistant to the minister, we are writing to you specifically concerning your evidence contained in document #1/03/04 dated July 23/08 which you submitted two days before the hearings ended. The information contained in the document which you referred to throughout the committee hearings contains no source references. We would be grateful if you would provide us with these reference sources including all of the raw data used to arrive at these conclusions.

"With regards to your document as it relates to section 6 we would also like to know more about your evidence that: '... there are only 10 known groups operating in Ontario with the name 'Humane Society' which are not affiliated with the OSPCA...' Please provide us with more specific details and how these organizations were included on list and by whom.

"Further, we would like more information concerning the statement: '... section 6 of Bill 50 would also repeal the current section 10 of the OSPCA Act to enable over 200 animal welfare groups that are not affiliated with the OSPCA to continue operating legally...' Please provide with us a copy of your legal opinion in this regard. Does that mean that the more than 200 animal welfare groups are now operating illegally? If this is in fact the case, please provide further details about why this has been permitted to continue and for what period of time?

"Thank you for your consideration of our request.

"Awaiting your reply, I remain, yours sincerely,

"Michael O'Sullivan

"Chairman and CEO

"The Humane Society of Canada"

Mr. O'Sullivan was in fact someone who provided a lot of information and background in the hearings and made some, I thought, very good presentations to the committee. Now that we have this request from him, I'm hoping that in fact Mr. Levac, through the ministry, will respond and answer all those questions he has asked. It seems that his deputation has really been made incomplete because of the lack of answers for some of the data that was provided by the parliamentary assistant leading up to that.

I did want to say that one organization that really showed tremendous leadership on this bill—I had an opportunity to visit their premises—was the Toronto Humane Society. They had huge concerns around section 6, and those concerns were passed on to other humane societies across the province, Burlington etc., that made deputations as well. I just want to say I was so pleased to be able to work, on this particular bill, with all of these organizations. As a critic, you often feel that you don't

have any say at all, but working with all of the different kinds of stakeholders from all different interests in the bill, I felt very fortunate that I had some trust put in my opinion on how we move forward with that. The Toronto Humane Society still has concerns with the legislation. A lot of it involves training of inspectors etc., but I've been very proud of the fact that we had the interest shown from them.

We also had people who are very passionate about animal welfare, people like Peter Worthington from the Toronto Sun. Recently I read—on second reading debate—an article of Mr. Worthington's that he had done on this particular bill.

So as we move forward—I think everybody in this House wants to support this bill. If it strengthens penalties for those causing distress to animals, we want to make sure we get it right. My concern right now is the regulations. We can pass this and leave this House, and we hope the recommendations that we think will be implemented through regulations will take place. I know that it has been a long time coming. I know people in the minister's office have offered us briefings on things, and maybe we can have briefings on the regulations that will be accepted and we can have more input that. I hope it's not just something that comes up on a computer screen some morning and then this is it forever, that there will be no debate or no comment on it.

I think I've put down a number of issues here today with licensing, with the Ontario Farm Animal Council and some of the concerns of the Toronto Humane Society and the Humane Society of Canada. If you want to get this bill right and really and truly listen to all the stakeholders, I think you will have a lot more happy campers if we get these things correct in regulation and then turn to some of these people who are passionate about animal welfare and those who cause animals distress. I think we can look forward and have a bill that's even better if the regulations provide the background for that. I could read a lot of different articles into the record here, Mr. Speaker. I see you looking at your watch, and I'm assuming you want me to sit down fairly quickly. However—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's too late for that.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I can go for another 30 minutes, you know.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: We weren't heckling you.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You've been really good today. You've been really good with the heckling. It's because you know what I'm saying makes a lot of sense; that's why. We want to make sure that people, the stakeholders, are informed about these regulations and that there's a lot of comment time. We don't know it in this House; we don't know what's really perfect for animal welfare, but a lot of the people who are watching us in this House today or who will be reading Hansard know that there are things wrong with this bill that could be corrected in regulation. They can make it, as someone has said, from worst to first as far as animal welfare is concerned in the province of Ontario.

1650

With that, I will sit down. I appreciate very much the opportunity to comment on this bill, Bill 50, this afternoon and I look forward to further debate.

I just want to emphasize once again: Let's get these regulations right, and let's listen to stakeholders who continue to send letters in and make sure that their opinions are accounted for. Thanks very much, everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Once again, a wonderful presentation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further questions and comments? The member for Huron-Bruce.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Did you get the hint?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yes, I did get the hint.

I did want to take this opportunity to thank the member from Simcoe North. How often have you heard the member from Huron-Bruce say that to you? I want to thank you for the work that you have put into Bill 50.

I want to inform the members and the House today that I do strongly support Bill 50. I know there have been some concerns raised with regard to section 6 and also with regard to OFEC, which is the farm animals. But I do believe this is a very important piece of legislation. It's certainly long overdue, and what we can do to help strengthen the protection of animals, I believe, is something that we should get done.

I just want to relay one little story. I had the opportunity to—yes, it's a very little story. I had the opportunity to go out with the VON nurses the other day and I had the chance to go into five homes. Of those five homes, four homes had animals. They were all animals that had been saved from abuse. The story that everyone wanted to share with me was how important Bill 50 was to them, and they wanted to share the story of part of their family, be it a dog or be it a cat, and how they had saved that animal. These are stories, I think, that are important, so I just wanted to share them with the House.

I thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much for speaking. Questions and comments.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some more comments to the speech of the member from Simcoe North on Bill 50. Certainly, the member has worked hard on this bill, attending the five days of hearings this summer and putting forward many amendments, some that were approved. Today we heard his concerns with what will happen with the regulations.

I think it's true with just about any bill, but particularly with Bill 50, that all those who are affected by the regulations should have an opportunity to see the regulations and hopefully give their two cents' worth and improve the regulations. I wish the government would do that with any legislation, because we'd have rules that are clearer and that people understand and that work better if we followed that process.

The member raised concerns from the World Society for the Protection of Animals and their suggestions for a

zoo licensing regime, and I understand that that would be something that might happen in regulations. He raised concerns about the training of inspectors, and I would concur that I think it's important that these inspectors be properly trained.

The one thing I do have concerns with are the warrantless entry provisions, and I think it needs to be very clear, as well, how that will actually function.

I'd certainly like to commend the member from Simcoe North for all the good work he's done on this bill. We look forward to working with the government to pass this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Just very briefly, I too want to congratulate and thank the member from Simcoe North for his efforts with regard to Bill 50. He is the critic of the official opposition. He has a role to fulfill. I just want to tell him and the House that this was a very, very effective exercise in democracy.

Also, I want to put his mind at ease. Those partners in animal welfare have been working and will continue to work with the government in a very aggressive way to ensure that the regulations that we implement do indeed mirror the intent of this legislation. Again, I want to thank the member for Simcoe North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to reply, if he chooses to do so.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the member from Timmins–James Bay, the minister, the member from Huron–Bruce—I think that is the first time you've said something nice about me—and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for their kind words.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Historic day.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yeah. I think that's the first time you've said anything nice about anybody on this side of the House.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay. Sorry, I won't go any further.

I just want to say that as this bill's carried forward now and we have other people debate on it, and there'll be more correspondence, emails, faxes, phone calls, you name it, I think we're still going to have concerns that will be raised that we'll have to try to address.

I thank the minister. If you're putting everybody's mind at ease on that, that's a good thing. However, I read a number of things into the record that are out there right now that I hope we can resolve. Again, we're leaders here in the province of Ontario. We need to know that our legislation is leading legislation in our country, and it should go from worst to first. I hope that that's a statement we can use with a lot of things that we do in this particular Legislature. So we'll be watching it carefully. We'll also be raising it in question period. When things come up over the next three years, before we form the next government, we'll be looking forward to trying to make sure that we get Bill 50 correct and animal welfare correct.

Thank you very much, everyone, and enjoy the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I believe we have unanimous consent to stand down the lead for the New Democratic Party and that we adjourn the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins–James Bay is seeking unanimous consent of the House to stand down the leadoff for the New Democrats and to adjourn the debate. Agreed? Agreed.

Third reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to, notwithstanding standing order 38(b), deal with the late show at this time, following which the House will adjourn for the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Tourism is seeking unanimous consent of the House to initiate the late show forthwith and, afterwards, to adjourn for the day. Agreed? Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SMALL BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Newmarket–Aurora has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour yesterday. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or his parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I'm pleased to recognize the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: I requested this special debate on the challenges faced by small and medium-sized businesses because I'm concerned that the McGuinty government is failing this important sector in our province. I see it as my responsibility to ensure that the Premier and his ministers are fully informed of the challenges business owners are facing daily to keep their businesses operating and to point out how, all too often, this government is frustrating the best efforts of hard-working business owners to keep their doors open and the jobs that they've created in their community.

Yesterday, I asked the Premier a very specific question. I reminded him of his pre-election commitment to small and medium-sized employers that he would improve the inspection and audit processes to which businesses are subject in this province. In fact, the Premier reconfirmed that commitment in the 2008 Ontario budget, which stated, "Ontario's goal is to lead all Canadian jurisdictions in efforts to measure and reduce the regulatory burden."

1700

I pointed out to the Premier that given the reports from business owners from across the province that regulatory

burdens are increasing, not decreasing, has in fact the Premier forgotten his commitment? But rather than answering the question, the Premier referred it to the Minister of Labour, who proceeded into a rant about how I and my party want to “water down legislation and regulations when it comes to workplace ... safety.” He went on to say that I am “not on the side of workers” and that I don’t “want to protect workers.”

Speaker, the minister missed the point completely, and when I clarified that what I was referring to was the regulatory burden and the heavy-handed enforcement that government agencies are strangling businesses with, the best the minister could do was to pronounce that labour relations have never been better. And the Hansard record of his reply will show that it’s clear the minister fully misunderstood or simply does not understand that he has serious issues on his hands here in the province of Ontario.

That’s why we’re here now, because I want to give the Premier and his minister the same information I’m receiving daily from hard-working business owners. It’s my hope that the Premier will direct his ministers to the necessary steps to refocus the government agencies and their front-line staff to do what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is calling for, namely, to get all of the enforcement staff in government departments and agencies into a helping rather than hindering mode in this province.

I’m not asking government to compromise the health or safety of employees, and I’m not asking for a watering down of legislation or compliance, and neither are the business owners for whom I’m advocating today. I am asking for civility and respect. I’m asking that enforcement staff be redeployed to help business owners, by working with them, to understand the rules of engagement, to help them come into compliance rather than threaten them, and apply reasonableness and common sense in circumstances, especially in circumstances of first-time, innocent non-compliance with government regulation.

Surely this is not an unreasonable request, but let me put on the record what is happening with increasing frequency. The fact is that business owners in this province are constantly, on a daily basis, being harassed by people who should be “civil” servants, who should in fact be working with businesses in this province to help them better understand, and if they are not in compliance, to work with them to come into compliance—not to threaten, not to issue fine after fine and to conduct themselves in such a way that is, quite frankly, offensive to hard-working people in this province.

There are numerous examples of this behaviour. Judith Andrew of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business confirms that her organization has a banker’s box that is full of signed faxes that make that same point.

I trust that the government will receive this appeal in the spirit in which it is brought forward: simply to make the government aware that there are serious problems on the front lines of government service, and that steps must be taken to ensure that civility and respect are the prin-

ciples that guide our front-line civil servants in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour in response.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: As Minister Fonseca mentioned yesterday, the McGuinty government has worked with our partners, including employers, labour unions, employees, the WSIB and the safe work associations to lower the number of workplace injuries by 20%. I would also like to comment on what my ministry is doing to assist businesses in making sure that they are compliant with the laws of Ontario that are in place to promote healthy, safe and fair workplaces.

Over the past few years, my ministry has played a lead role in a key initiative—modernizing regulatory compliance in Ontario. Currently, 13 different regulatory ministries administer more than 120 statutes in this province. These statutes cover a wide range of responsibilities, including worker health and safety, environmental protection, commercial vehicle safety, food safety, consumer protection, natural resources protection, children’s daycare and foster care facilities, long-term health care facilities, landlord and tenant protection, and tax evasion. Across these ministries, there are more than 2,500 front-line staff undertaking activities related to enforcement of these statutes.

My ministry’s inspections, investigations, and enforcement secretariat led the development of the Regulatory Modernization Act, known as the RMA. The RMA came into effect earlier this year, in January. The RMA enables regulatory ministries and other regulators to work together in a more effective way to protect the public interest and reduce duplication in compliance-related activities.

For example, we can now tackle the duplication, collection and use of compliance information among ministries. Businesses can benefit from this because less duplication reduces their administrative burden in complying with provincial statutes. We expect to take full advantage of the RMA to look at other areas where we could further reduce the burden resulting from compliance-related activities. We will also undertake new initiatives to help businesses comply, and to target our government enforcement resources on serious repeat violators. Our approach is good for business, good for government, and most importantly, it’s good for the people of Ontario.

The investigations and enforcement secretariat has been involved in a pilot project promoting compliance awareness for small businesses seeking Ontario regulatory information. This project involved setting up two web-based compliance information centres, also known as CICs: one for the manufacturers in the plastic products sector, the other for the autobody repair sector. These websites contain one-window access to regulatory compliance requirements for these two sectors.

I’d like to mention I was the PA to the Minister of Government Services. I know the staff at that ministry worked very, very hard, and I can personally attest to the

fact that this was very much appreciated in both of these sectors: the plastics sector and the autobody sector. Previously, small businesses had to visit up to 13 regulatory ministries' websites to access the information they needed. These sites were developed by the investigations and enforcement secretariat in partnership with representatives of the two industrial sectors and the regulatory ministries. The feedback received from these sectors that we have worked with to date is a strong indicator that we are on the right track in addressing the compliance challenges that Ontario businesses face.

The Canadian Plastics Industry Association has been a very enthusiastic supporter of the CIC for plastics. Its president and CEO, Serge Lavoie, recently told us, "Not only have we encouraged our members to make use of the site in order to speed up and simplify the process for achieving full compliance with government regulations,

but we have also actively encouraged other provincial governments to adopt a similar model."

Small business owners in these sectors can now readily access relevant regulatory information in a way that is easy to understand. To date, these outcomes include sector-specific, cross-government compliance information delivered in a consistent format on a web-based platform, reducing duplication in information posting; and effective use of information management tools and approaches while improving service delivery to other small business sectors. We have listened, and we have responded.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1709.

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Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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