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Wednesday 16 September 2009

Mercredi 16 septembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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

Wednesday 16 September 2009

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 16 septembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO LABOUR
MOBILITY ACT, 2009
LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2009
SUR LA MOBILITÉ
DE LA MAIN-D'OEUVRE

Mr. Flynn, on behalf of Mr. Milloy, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories /
Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise this morning. With the Ontario Labour Mobility Act, 2009, our government is going to be strengthening the economic opportunity for our own workers, for other Canadian workers and for industries by making full labour mobility the law in the province of Ontario. If passed, the act we have before us is going to allow Ontario to meet its obligations under amendments to the Agreement on Internal Trade, the AIT, which was ratified by the provinces and territories on August 11 this year. The amendments are intended to remove labour mobility barriers that certified workers in regulated professions and skilled trades in the province of Ontario and in Canada currently face when they relocate to another part of our country.

These changes will allow individuals to move freely across Canada. It will allow them to work where they choose, where opportunities exist and where their skills are needed. In Ontario, the changes will affect about 80 of the regulated authorities and about 300 occupations that Ontario citizens are engaged in. Those occupations are as varied as nurses, teachers, architects, engineers, mechanics and many, many others.

By providing full labour mobility for these professions and trades, we're going to strengthen Ontario's economy and our national economy by improving the productivity

and competitiveness of both our economies. This act is going to help industries address changing labour market needs and is going to take advantage of opportunities in the growing sectors of our economy. It's going to support the right of Ontarians, and indeed the right of all Canadians, to live and work where they want in our country.

This bill springs from the shared commitment of all Canadian provinces and territories and the federal government to eliminate or reduce labour mobility barriers. In July 2008, at a meeting of the Council of the Federation, Canada's Premiers all recognized that achieving full labour mobility is critical to meeting the country's labour market demands. At that meeting, all the Premiers also agreed in principle to amend the Agreement on Internal Trade, whose acronym is AIT. The AIT is a national agreement. It's been signed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and it commits all parties to work together to remove barriers to the movement of persons, goods, services and investments within our country.

The AIT is not new. It was signed in 1994. It came into effect on July 1, 1995. Chapter 7 of the AIT focuses on removing labour mobility barriers within the regulated professions or the skilled trades. However, the 1994 agreement had only limited success, and that's primarily because it lacked strong enforcement mechanisms and because the commitments to labour mobility within the agreement at that time were not made clear.

As we move forward on this, we can look at some of the examples where many regulators still require out-of-province applicants to actually reside in the province before they can be certified. That means that somebody in Ontario who perhaps is moving somewhere else to practise their profession would have to move first and then become certified. Other examples of where restrictions lie today are those that impose requirements for additional material training, experience, examinations or assessments on out-of-province applicants, but those applicants are already certified by another Canadian regulator.

In other words, what's happening today and what we need to change is that if these individuals cross a provincial border to find work, they have to complete all over again the certification process they've already completed in another jurisdiction. It costs money, it costs valuable time and the recertification in an occupation or trade they are already fully qualified in may be absolutely unnecessary.

The issue is particularly important for new Canadians. We have to ensure that new Canadians who move to our country from other countries and who are already quali-

fied to practise a profession in one province are not asked to recertify when they get a job in another province. Changes to the AIT that are included in this bill ensure that this protection is provided.

As of August 11, amendments to the AIT were ratified by all jurisdictions that commit the federal government, all the provinces and all the territories to removing labour mobility barriers that are currently faced by certified workers in the regulated professions and in the skilled trades. Amendments to chapter 17 of the AIT that put in place stronger mechanisms that will allow us to enforce the agreement and resolve disputes are expected to be ratified later this year.

Under the amended AIT, jurisdictions can now apply for exceptions to labour mobility, but only when they protect the public interest in such areas, perhaps, as public security, the health and safety of their citizens, or for environmental and consumer protection. This is not a race to the bottom, however. This is about giving more people more opportunity to work where they're able to find that opportunity within our country.

Now, there are differences in some occupations between the jurisdictions that currently exist in Canada, and we're balancing our goal of full labour mobility with the other responsibilities that we have, one of those being the need to protect the public and consumers. The AIT is going to require that exceptions to labour mobility be published on a national website maintained by the Forum of Labour Market Ministers. In Ontario, that will mean that exceptions that are supported by the Ontario government would be posted on a website maintained by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Exceptions must be posted on a website, and they can be challenged by the other provinces and territories in the confederation. Jurisdictions that fail to meet their obligations to remove these barriers to labour mobility face strong enforcement measures, and that's how it should be. Enforcement measures include penalties that range from a quarter of a million dollars for the smallest provinces and territories up to \$5 million for the largest, Ontario being one of those.

0910

The amended AIT also encourages provincial and territorial regulators to reconcile differences in advance in the occupational standards, but clearly maintain the ability of all jurisdictions to set standards that they deem appropriate—which means in the province of Ontario, control over the standards would still reside with the government of Ontario.

The importance of labour mobility in this can't be overstated. By endorsing changes to the AIT, all the Premiers in the country recognized that labour mobility will become an even more important issue in Canadians' economic lives and the country's economy over the upcoming years. This is certainly true in Ontario. I think all members would agree with that.

Demographic projections show us that Ontario's labour force is aging as we speak and will grow at a much slower rate in the future. Projections also show that

through to the year 2030, Ontario's labour force will grow at less than 1% per year. That's half the growth Ontario experienced during the past 25 years.

Interprovincial migration is becoming more important as a means of meeting labour market demand in Ontario and in the rest of the country. But we need to make the process more efficient by lowering barriers to the movement of skilled workers, while still maintaining the integrity of the system.

Many occupations currently have a relatively high degree of mobility. By introducing this bill, we're going to make certification even more efficient for qualified and skilled individuals who want to move to Ontario to succeed in Ontario's changing and growing economy. Full labour mobility is expected to support labour market demand in the growing sectors of Ontario's economy, such as the health-related occupations.

If you look around the province of Ontario, if you look around the country, you'll see that many workers in skilled trades already enjoy full labour mobility, and that's thanks to what we call the interprovincial standards red seal program. The red seal program, for those of you who aren't familiar with it, sets common occupational standards across Canada for many of the trades. The standards are developed and endorsed by the industries themselves. Workers with the red seal can work anywhere in this country they want, anywhere their skills are needed. They are highly employable because employers already know in advance, as soon as they see that red seal, that they've got the skills and the knowledge the employers need to get the job done. Ontario's ongoing commitment to the red seal program is specifically mentioned in the proposed legislation that we have before us today.

The amended AIT and our proposed legislation both support the red seal program as a model for achieving the full labour mobility we want to see, and also for achieving the national standards of excellence for training and certification in the skilled trades.

Workers who currently have red seal certification will continue to enjoy the full labour mobility that they enjoy today. But the AIT amendments go further than that. They also provide labour mobility to certified trades and workers in non-red-seal trades that have been matched across jurisdictions.

Here in the province of Ontario, our government has been working through the industry advisory committees that exist for these trades to determine matches, where feasible, acceptable and desirable.

The Ontario government is going to continue to support industry in maintaining and expanding the red seal program as the Canadian standard of excellence for training and certification in the skilled trades, and we should be especially proud of that.

Our labour mobility provisions attempt to strike a balance between ensuring full mobility for all certified workers in the skilled trades through the AIT and the red seal program, while supporting and preserving the very high standards that we have for certification right here in the province of Ontario.

For Ontario workers in the trades that have been matched under the AIT process—and some of those would be automobile transmission technicians, autobody repairers—the changes are going to provide them with a mobility that they don't currently have today. It's going to provide them with new mobility to pursue those same employment opportunities and increased opportunities throughout the entire country.

Ontario's support for full labour mobility also extends to the economic partnership agreement that was just signed with the province of Quebec on September 11. That agreement includes a labour mobility chapter. Both the province of Ontario and the province of Quebec agreed to remove labour mobility barriers for certified workers that are consistent with the amended AIT. This agreement builds on the 2006 construction labour mobility agreement that was signed between the two provinces. But it also includes something expanded. It includes a new process that's designed to expedite complaints and head off any potential labour mobility disputes between the jurisdictions.

The elements of the legislation, I think, should meet with the favour of this House. I'd like to describe some of the key elements of the proposed legislation. If Bill 175 is passed, it will establish a labour mobility code to guide how Ontario's regulators will support full mobility for out-of-province workers who are already certified by another Canadian regulator in another jurisdiction in the confederation. The bill is going to establish in law the fundamental principle of the AIT; namely, that subject to limited exceptions, a worker certified to work in a regulated profession or trade in one province or territory in the confederation will also be certified in that same occupation in Ontario without having to complete additional material training, without any additional experience, without any additional examinations and without any further assessment. The bill will also allow certified workers to apply for certification within the province of Ontario without having to be a resident of the province of Ontario at that time.

The bill is very clear. It sets out the standards, and it's going to recognize the authority of Ontario's regulators to set the occupational standards that are considered appropriate to protect the public interest in our province. But it's also going to encourage regulators to work with their colleagues across our country to reconcile any differences in standards that exist and to clear them up and mitigate them where possible. The bill would allow the responsible minister to review the responsible practices and take all necessary steps to ensure that those practices indeed comply with the labour mobility code.

The bill requires that any changes to training standards or to the scope of practice by a jurisdiction must also be communicated to all other jurisdictions within the country. This process is going to enable other provinces to determine whether or not changes that are made in other jurisdictions comply with the respective training standards within their own jurisdiction and, for the purposes of this bill, within the province of Ontario.

I mentioned earlier that strong enforcement measures are very important, and this bill is going to establish those strong enforcement measures. Some of the enforcement measures that are being strengthened would include giving the Ontario government the ability to impose administrative penalties on non-compliant regulators. It would provide the Ontario government with the authority to comply with a dispute resolution process that is already established under the amended AIT. It would establish the province's right to recover any penalty imposed by an AIT panel against Ontario resulting from non-compliance by any one of the regulators. The bill is going to amend Ontario's existing laws to conform to the labour mobility code.

If Bill 175 is passed, the following provisions will take effect immediately upon the act coming into force. The act will override any other provisions in any other act, regulation or bylaw that are in conflict with the labour mobility code. The act will apply to applications for certification made on or after the day the act comes into force or to any other application that has been applied for but where a final decision has not been made. To ensure transparency, the act will require regulators to publish on their websites all of the certification requirements that workers already certified elsewhere in the country must meet in order to work in our province, right here in Ontario.

0920

Since last summer, our government has been working with the provincial regulators, with industry and with stakeholders to discuss the changes under the amended AIT and to help them to meet their new obligations. Through these discussions, Ontario has been able to eliminate or reduce barriers to labour mobility and keep possible exceptions to an absolute minimum. Discussions with the regulators about implementation will continue during the legislative process and over the coming weeks and months.

The Ontario Labour Mobility Act, if passed, would make full mobility for certified workers in the regulated professions and skilled trades the law in the province of Ontario. The act would allow Ontario to meet its obligations under an agreement approved by all Premiers and the Prime Minister. It's aimed at removing mobility barriers across this country. Ontario needs full labour mobility to strengthen our productivity, to strengthen our competitiveness and to address the changing labour market needs that we all know are coming.

I would urge all members of this House to support the economic opportunity that's contained within this bill. It's going to support Ontario's improved productivity and competitiveness. It's going to support the right of all Ontarians and of all Canadians to live and work where they choose in our great country. By supporting Bill 175 in this Legislature, all members will be supporting a bill that is going to mean increased productivity, increased competitiveness for our own economy, and increased opportunities for Canadians who currently reside in the province of Ontario, those who reside outside of the

province of Ontario and those immigrants who are considering moving to this great country to be part of the economic growth that we're experiencing.

I would ask all members of the House to give this bill strong consideration and give it their support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say congratulations for once again being in the chair. I hope you had a lovely summer, and it's wonderful to see you again.

It is a pleasure to be able to add comments to Bill 175, the Ontario Labour Mobility Act. It's a good thing that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is here, of course. He and I are on the boundary of another great province in this confederation, the province of Quebec, so I think it's significant that he is here to listen to the concerns of the Progressive Conservative caucus on Bill 175, the Ontario Labour Mobility Act.

Of course, the position of the PC Party is that we support this legislation in theory, but the key issue in this bill is on the exemptions that this bill allows that have yet to be established. I think that is critical if we are to move forward in this Legislature to deal with the labour mobility inequalities and equities between our two provinces. This bill is to fulfill Ontario's labour mobility obligations under the Agreement on Internal Trade. This bill would recognize certification in other provinces in which apprentice-journeymen ratios are 1 to 1, despite the minister refusing to revise those ratios in Ontario. That is something that you will recall we have been raising on this side of the chamber for literally the last couple of years. It is one of those big issues of concern that we have for our apprenticeships and journeymen across this province.

Of course, I am very proud that in Nepean, which I share with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, we have probably one of the greatest trade centres coming online at Algonquin College. We are very, very proud, regardless of political party or stripe, in the city of Ottawa to have such a great training ground for tomorrow's journeymen and skilled tradesmen and women.

I just want to point out in the few seconds remaining that Ontario is the first province in Canada to introduce this legislation, which will essentially open up our borders to workers from other provinces before they open up their borders to our workers. This is a serious piece of legislation, and we will continue to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments? The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and indeed it's an honour to see you back in the chair as well.

I listened intently to the member from Oakville as he outlined the government's position. I think New Democrats feel that this is a very complex bill and are urging some degree of caution as it works its way through to make sure that we get it right, because there are some

potential pitfalls that we know may ensue. We know that this bill is similar to the provisions set out in NAFTA and how that has impacted the provinces as well as the federal government.

We are urging some caution because the member quite correctly said that the provisions of this bill "will override any other law." We are cautious about this because the laws that have been built up in the province of Ontario are designed to protect workers in the province of Ontario or designed to protect the public and the public interest of the people of Ontario. To have a bill such as this that which will override virtually every other law, we need to make sure that we get it right.

The member from Oakville also talked about how this will guarantee the right to live and work anywhere in the country. Well, I don't think this bill is going to do that. The Constitution of Canada already provides that right. Any Canadian citizen, any permanent resident, any person who is resident in Canada has mobility and is free to travel from one end of this country to the other without let or hindrance. The only thing this is going to do, quite frankly, is to possibly extend the constitutional right to allow people to take their credentials with them.

As I said, we need to be very cautious and proceed with some considerable care as this bill works its way through.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It's a pleasure to take part in this debate for even a few minutes. Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry being a border constituency with the province of Quebec, this is certainly a bill that is of great interest to the constituents in my riding. When I think of the comments that I've heard in the past, and being closely associated with my good friend from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, his being a border community too with the bridge at Hawkesbury, there have been problems in the past. It was certainly exciting last year to hear that this was on the agenda of the Council of the Federation when the Premiers met and agreed to amend the Agreement on Internal Trade, which would reduce the barriers to those in regulated occupations who wished to work in other provinces.

This agreement, originally signed in 1994, has had a number of problems over the 15 years. With this agreement and with this act, Bill 175, we're hoping to create opportunities that will reduce those barriers and, as the member from Oakville said, give all citizens in our province equal opportunity, especially when I think of new immigrants and the barriers they face as they come into our province. For those immigrants who are skilled, who have the knowledge, who have the understanding, they will be able to get into the workforce and be part of the economic recovery and the economic success of our province.

I certainly support this and look forward to its passage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to commend you, Mr. Speaker, and it's good to see you back in the chair. I don't know what all the fuss is about; you've been there for, some would say, too long.

Laughter.

Mr. John O'Toole: But anyway, the real issue here is that labour mobility is an ideal state. Certainly the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry mentioned a timely issue, which is the mobility of Quebec to Ontario, but the lack of mobility of Ontario to Quebec. That's really an important issue. In fact, we had a piece of legislation when we were in government that was called *Fairness Is a Two-Way Street*. I can remember Minister Flaherty standing on the bridge between Quebec and—

Hon. Jim Watson: It didn't work.

Mr. John O'Toole: It didn't work, quite honestly. I'm being very honest. What I'm saying here is that this won't work either. This won't work because this bill here—it says the bill will not affect labour mobility with Quebec, although the government is currently working on negotiations. They've been talking about that for 20 years.

Now, I'm not trying to be disparaging of the bill. That's not my point. Let's deal with the facts the way they are, the way they exist. Let's not have illusions here that are not founded in fact.

0930

I think this Agreement on Internal Trade is a perfect state, but what we've got to be worried about is the issue of standards and quality. We cannot be seen to be, or even in reality, lowering standards. I'm going to mention two. The CAs, the chartered accountants of Ontario, are a unique brand of accounting. We don't need to lower standards in public auditing and accounting—so other provinces don't have those standards? The other that I'm aware of at the moment, and I'd encourage viewers to call me because I'm genuinely interested because I have a degree in this area, a labour economics degree—but opticians as well. Opticians in BC have four months of training; in Ontario, they have four years of training. They are able to do refractions and other kinds of medical procedures which could cause—this is where we'd like to end up, but this bill doesn't get us there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oakville, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to respond, and thank you very much for the comments from the other members, specifically those from Nepean–Carleton, Beaches–East York, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and I believe the member from Durham was actually supporting it in his comments, I think. I took his comments to be constructive. In his crusty, usual demeanour, I think he was trying to be nice, and I think I'll take that as being a constructive comment.

I think all members of the House, and certainly all those who have spoken, myself included, recognize that we live in changing times and that Ontario is really not immune to some of the pressures that affect our econ-

omy. It wouldn't be unusual, and I think when you look at the demographic trends of the future, it's not unusual to think that we're going to have to attract a number of workers to this province because we have an aging workforce. Also, at the same time, I can think of a number of my own colleagues, and probably any one of us around the House today could think of people who have moved to other parts of the country, either permanently or on a temporary basis, to achieve economic opportunities in those jurisdictions.

What this bill is, it's an aid to allow the passage of that to happen in a much more coherent and much more efficient way than it's happening right now. Other places, for example, in other trades, you may have to move to a different province, then set up a residency, then apply for certification, then take an examination, then perhaps take extra training, when really, in effect, you had the qualifications to begin with. We need to put an end to that sort of inefficiency in the mobility of skilled labour and otherwise in this country. This bill goes a long way towards doing that. I hope we can work out some of the differences that may exist between some of the comments that have come forward and allow this bill to move forward.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Again, I echo others' comments; it is a pleasure to see you back in the chair again this morning.

It is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak on Bill 175, the Ontario Labour Mobility Act, 2009. First, unlike other bills that have been debated this week, at least this bill is substantial. It amends six different acts and comes in at a whopping 32 pages. I think the climate change bill only had a grand total of three pages, and that represented the McGuinty government's attempt to stop global warming.

However, in regard to Bill 175, our party has some significant concerns with this bill, and I would urge the government to fill in some of the blanks before we move much further on this bill. Having said that, we want this bill before committee because we want to hear from the stakeholders what they think of it and the ways that the government could make this bill better.

Make no mistake: The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party is the party of free trade. We will support any government action that reduces barriers to trade. We believe that if we want to grow the economy, we need to stay away from protectionist feelings and embrace free trade in every way. We are concerned that this bill is just a ruse when it comes to free trade. This bill could actually create more barriers to trade.

I think it is fair to say that we want to support this bill. This will help lower internal trade barriers, and that is a noble goal. However, the cart seems to be coming before the horse on this. We understand that this proposed piece of legislation will support Ontario in meeting its labour mobility obligations under the Agreement on Internal Trade. Everyone in this House will know that the Agreement on Internal Trade is an agreement between the provinces, territories and federal government.

One of our concerns with this piece of legislation is that if passed as it is, it would establish a labour mobility code for regulatory authorities in Ontario. The code, according to the bill's compendium, will govern how regulatory authorities treat applications from individuals already certified in the same occupation by a regulatory authority in another province or territory.

According to the material provided by the government, this bill would set out the core rule that, subject to some exceptions, an individual certified in an occupation in one province or territory is to be certified in Ontario in that same occupation without requiring additional material training, experience, examinations or assessment. This bill, if passed, would recognize certification in other provinces in which apprentice-journeyman ratios are 1 to 1 despite the minister's refusing to revise those ratios in Ontario. This will put Ontario apprentices at a disadvantage in trying to find skilled trade jobs.

This seems to fly in the face of everything this government has said about apprenticeship training. For years now our party, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, has wanted the government to reduce the apprenticeship ratios from 3 to 1 to 1 to 1, like most of our other competitors. These are the people to whom, with this bill, we are opening our borders. Now, whenever we say that the government should reduce ratios so we are competitive, they say we would be sacrificing quality and safety and it just can't be done. We believe it can be done and that it should be done so that our workers can compete on a level playing field with workers in other jurisdictions.

We understand that Working Families seems to have some Svengali-like hold on the government of the day when it comes to lowering apprenticeship ratios, but if we don't change, we run the risk of not being able to meet the labour demands of the future. I would hope that for once this government will ignore their friends at Working Families, embrace a reduction in apprenticeship ratios and tell their friends it's the right thing to do for our young people and the right thing to do for Ontario. If the government changed the ratios so that it took one journeyman to train one apprentice, it would immediately open up thousands of apprenticeship positions and would open the door for good, high-paying jobs for our young people. Currently, Ontario's ratios are far behind most provinces, including British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick and Manitoba. We are near the back of the pack when it comes to fairness for skilled workers. The Premier and the minister should stop catering to special interests and unions at the expense of providing opportunities for young Ontarians.

This government continually talks about how important skilled trades are for young people, yet they obstruct every employment opportunity through these unfair ratios. Not only does this affect people who want to go into the trades, but it hurts small businesses across Ontario, not hiring the skilled employees needed to replace retiring workers or to meet growing workloads. Under Bill 175, those jobs will be filled by out-of-province

workers who will have unfettered access to our market. Our workers could compete if the government would let them.

Here we are now debating a bill that will make it easier for tradespeople who have been trained in other jurisdictions, with different work ratios, to come in and get high-paying jobs at the expense of Ontario workers. This situation exists because this government has chosen to take no action on the reduction of apprenticeship ratios. Since this bill was introduced in the spring, many stakeholders have come forward with some fairly significant concerns. Our self-regulating health providers, such as optometrists, have indicated that they will have to seriously look at how they train new optometrists so they can compete with jurisdictions that don't have as rigorous a training program. They have told us that in British Columbia, for example, optometrists are fully trained in their jurisdiction after only six months; in Ontario it takes four years.

We need guarantees from this government that as we open the door to trained individuals from other provinces, that doesn't start a race to the bottom, where you have to accept only minimal standards. Given that this bill opens the floodgates, our party is hopeful that it is a sign they will be reducing the punishing apprenticeship ratios under which our apprentices have to be trained. That way, the playing field can be levelled and we will be able to compete.

0940

I should point out that Ontario is the first province in Canada to introduce this legislation that will essentially open up our borders to workers from other provinces before they open their borders to workers from Ontario. One of the questions we need answered before we proceed much further with this bill is, what commitments does the minister have from his counterparts in other provinces for their enabling legislation? What are their time frames? I think we would want to proceed in a fashion that opens all jurisdictions at the same time.

As it is written, Bill 175 would make it illegal for an Ontario regulatory authority to require that an applicant who is a resident of another Canadian jurisdiction be an Ontario resident as a condition of certification. Additionally, a municipality could not require that an individual reside in the municipality's geographic area as a condition of eligibility for employment. This is something, obviously, that makes sense if you're only truly interested in the free mobility of labour. However, this bill does throw up some fairly significant roadblocks to the free mobility of labour.

One is that an Ontario regulatory authority would be able to impose a certification requirement that the government has adopted under article 708 of the AIT. A regulatory authority would also be able to require that applicants demonstrate proficiency in English or French if they did not already demonstrate an equivalent proficiency. One concern we have in this area is that this could be a bar to new immigrants who are residents of our province who could have skills but, if they don't have

proficiency in English or in the other official language, French, could be unduly harmed.

Our party believes strongly that this bill will be a barrier to new Canadians as they try to enter our workforce. One of our new leader's goals is to make Ontario the economic powerhouse that it once was and to do what we need to do for new Canadians to be full participants in our workforce. By forcing individuals to demonstrate proficiency in English or in French, we may be blocking many highly trained, fully credentialed individuals from becoming certified.

By way of an example of why this is a problem, according to Statistics Canada, in 2006 the population of the city of Markham was 261,573 people, of which 103,440 said that the language they used at home was neither English nor French. The members for Oak Ridges–Markham and Markham–Unionville should know that their constituents will be very interested to learn that their members of the Legislature are creating barriers to employment for new Canadians.

We are not the party of picking winners or losers; that's the group on the other side of the House. This provision tries to pick winners and losers, in our opinion. Let the market decide. Accept the credentials, regardless of language. This highlights why we are concerned about this bill. We believe that under the guise of fair trade the McGuinty government may be throwing up more barriers, not removing them. With the right kind of amendments, our party could support this bill.

There are provisions in Bill 175 that ensure that credentialed individuals from other jurisdictions have to be in good standing in those jurisdictions. For example, the act specifically states that an Ontario regulatory authority would be able to refuse to certify an individual or impose terms, conditions or limitations on the individual's certificate if deemed necessary to protect the public interest because of complaints or proceedings relating to competency, conduct or character—otherwise, the three Cs.

The regulatory authority would also be able to impose an equivalent requirement or refuse to certify an individual who has a certificate subject to a practice limitation, restriction or condition. The details on how the government intends to enforce these still need to be worked out, and we hope that by the time this bill reaches committee, the government will come forward with a plan to protect the public.

With many of the McGuinty government bills, they ask us to approve them pending regulations that will come at a later date. That is a concern to us. The minister, or his or her designate, will monitor and be authorized to review the regulations, bylaws or other instruments made by the authority under its authorizing statute to assess their conformity with this labour mobility code. The minister could also ask the regulatory authority to amend any instrument to ensure compliance with the code. So the minister will set up the regulatory authority but apparently will still maintain a direct line of accountability for it. It is good to finally see a minister take responsibility when we know that this government may bob and

weave from responsibility at every opportunity. I wonder if the minister is being set up here. I guess only time will tell in that regard.

Again, we will support any bill that truly would increase free trade. I think we need to be convinced that this bill accomplishes that. We will be looking forward to the rest of the debate on this bill and we hopefully will get a full debate at committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the honourable member as he spoke. I was expecting—this was a one-hour leadoff, and I was kind of surprised to see the debate truncated. It appears that he is supporting the bill, but he has asked for some reasonable and rational things. I think I tried to say that in the last opportunity for two minutes, that we have to proceed with some caution. I understand that this has taken place in other parts of Canada, particularly with the TILMA discussions in Alberta and BC, which form, I guess, the template for what we are doing here today. But there have been some problems ensuing there, and I hope that Ontario, in discussing a very similar and like matter, can deal with those.

It appears that the honourable member, on behalf of his party, is saying that they are the party of freer trade. I don't know; I never doubted that for a moment, given what happened around NAFTA and the Brian Mulroney years. In any event, the most important part of what he had to say was that we get some additional information, we proceed with caution upon that information, and that we do what is correct and right for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise and to comment on the comments of the member from Sarnia–Lambton. Certainly, he concentrated on job ratios a little bit in his comments. We should note—and I think you've got to give credit where credit is due—that when his party was in power, they didn't change any of the ratios. They had the opportunity to change the ratios and they didn't change one of them. Since we've been in power, we've changed eight of them. So I think you've really got to look at who's serious about doing something here.

I think all members are saying that they support this bill. From what I've heard, they support the concept behind this bill. Other jurisdictions have moved ahead on this type of legislation already. The province of Manitoba, for example, has passed their legislation already. They've moved to full passage.

I think some of the details that the member from Beaches–East York is bringing out and which need to be looked at—that's the role of the House, that's the role of the committee process, to take a look at some of the details that accompany any bill and to see if it can be improved or to see if there's things that can be clarified for members of the public or the industry. But I think what we can't lose sight of is that the intent of this bill and the concept behind this bill will allow Ontarians and

all Canadians to participate in their economy more fully. I think this is the sort of legislation that, quite frankly, we need to pass if we're going to be competitive in today's global economy. This is the sort of mobility we have to have. The way we were doing it in the past, that just simply isn't going to work anymore.

I think this is a government that has shown that it has preferred to take the bull by the horns, that it's prepared to move forward on this type of legislation. It's the sort of legislation that, I think, meets the needs of both those people that are employed in the industry and those employers that employ people in industries that have skilled trades and regulated professions. It's worthy of the support of all members of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I think the member from Sarnia-Lambton really captured the wish to do the right thing but the uncertainty that this is the right thing. He comes from a background in labour and management, and he knows, having worked at Nova Chemicals for a number of years—I'll let him explain that.

I think the issue of ratios is very pertinent to the discussion here this morning, and I leave it with the minister. We want to move forward, but you've got to deal with the ratios. Mr. Dunlop has mentioned it in the past and there have been members that have raised this issue besides the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

0950

But I do want to caution members that some of what's being said by the parliamentary assistant isn't quite accurate. If you read the explanatory notes on page 1, it says, "The labour mobility code contains the following exceptions to the rule against imposing material additional training.... (1) An Ontario regulatory authority is not prohibited from imposing on the applicant any requirement that is identified on the website of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as a permissible certification requirement...." It goes on to say, "(3) An Ontario regulatory authority is not prohibited from requiring the applicant" to undergo and obtain certain material additional training and experience.

The parliamentary assistant should—I know that the notes they gave you from the ministry are very well done by professionals. However, I would encourage you to read the bill. Read the explanatory notes. The devil is in the detail here.

In fact, the colleges—I finally have to say, you are either taking away these authorities of these skills groups or training groups or you're not. And if you're not, it says right here that they are "not prohibited from requiring the applicant to undertake, obtain or undergo material additional training, experience, examinations or assessments if the applicant has not practised the regulated occupation" in Ontario.

We would like to think that fairness is fairness. We don't want people to come to Ontario and take Ontario jobs unless we have the same rights in their province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I'm delighted to comment on this very important bill. Let me tell you, as the opposition people are fully aware, that just two years ago, the Premier sat down with Premier Charest to come up with an agreement for construction labour mobility. The previous government had done a lot of work to succeed, but they never succeeded. Finally, the Premier sat down with Premier Charest and they came up with an agreement so that today, construction people can cross the provincial border and do work in Quebec without any problem, as long as they follow the regulations that are in place for their own employees.

But let me tell you, Premier McGuinty should be congratulated for having shown leadership on this very important bill. We are in Canada. We should be able to go and work in Newfoundland, in Nova Scotia or in Quebec.

We have a meeting coming up on October 22 and 23 of APOQ, which is the parliamentary association of Ontario and Quebec. We have some issues in there that we will discuss again on home care services. This is something again where anybody who gets sick in Quebec and would like to reside in their parents' home in Ontario, or vice versa, cannot get home care services at this time. The same thing for prescriptions: If you are a resident of Quebec and you are at your mother's home in Ontario, you cannot purchase your prescriptions in Ontario.

But at the present time, in this bill, there are a lot of issues by which every one of the professionals in Ontario will benefit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Sarnia, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure. I'd like to thank the members from Beaches-East York, Oakville, Durham and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell for their remarks and comments on my remarks today.

Like I said, we support the principles of free trade, freedom of mobility and movement of labour across jurisdictions. We look forward to committee, where we'll be able to delve into this bill at greater length and hopefully to make it better and to make sure that if there are discrepancies, as the member for Durham pointed out, with perhaps the college of trades being able to overrule parts of this, we get those questions answered. We look forward to working with the different members in committee in doing that.

Also, it was brought to my attention earlier today that apparently, with the strike at licensing bureaus, there are a number of bus drivers and school bus drivers who are unable to get their licences. I don't know whether this is an example of labour mobility, but I was told that a number of bus drivers from Toronto had to go to Ottawa to drive busses. I don't know if that's an example of labour mobility that the government was looking for. I'm sure it wasn't. But anyway, that's one of the ramifications for industry, with the economy as it is.

Thank you to all the members, and I look forward to the debate in committee.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I wonder if I might preface my remarks: I am seeking unanimous consent to hold down the lead. Our member is not here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches—East York is seeking unanimous consent to stand down the third party's lead. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much. That allows me a full 20 minutes, which is more than enough time for me to make the comments I need to make.

I'd like to start off by talking about this bill in terms of its broad application and why we have some concerns not necessarily with the bill but with how it may impact other laws and the Constitution of Canada.

I'll start out by talking about mobility rights, which this bill is intended to help. I would agree it will help mobility, not of people, but of assets and qualifications, to cross one provincial border and another. The Canadian Constitution already is very clear: Any person who is a Canadian citizen, a permanent resident, or who is legally in Canada has full mobility rights. They are not in any way hindered from crossing one provincial boundary to another. They are not hindered in any way from doing all things that are legal within this country. They are not hindered in any way from looking for work or accepting work in any province. The holdback here, if there is a holdback at all, is that people often cannot take their qualifications with them. If a person is legally entitled to be an electrician or a plumber or a carpenter or any other profession in Ontario, they cannot necessarily follow that profession into another province. The ones we deal most often with, of course, are our neighbours, either Manitoba or Quebec, and so those are the ones where we need to look for those mobility rights and vice versa—but the Constitution already allows them to do that. I'm hoping that when this bill is debated it will not infringe upon a constitutional right, because some lawyers have suggested it may and that if the bill is to proceed and is to become law, it needs to very clearly not take away any rights that people already have. That's the first thing that we need to talk about.

The second thing that we need to take a very close look at—and the member from Oakville talked about this in his remarks—is that the provisions of this bill will override any other law. This is very troublesome to me and, I guess, to the New Democratic Party because we are a nation of laws; we are a province of laws. We pass laws in this Legislature all the time for the public good, and to have this bill override some of those—we need to be careful with that. We need to be very careful with what we're doing and what authority we give, because in the desire to free up trade and the desire to allow mobility of experience and to recognize others' credentials, we need to make sure that we are not doing so to the detriment of the people of this province and indeed to the detriment of the people of this country. I know that when this goes to committee we'll want to have a very clear

look at how this wording is ultimately framed and the regulations that go with it to make sure that what we are trying to do to build a better society, a better province, is not impugned in any way, where this bill will allow it to be overridden easily.

Before I go into the main meat of what I have to say, we are also, I think, a little worried about the provisions involving red seal, because there is but one line in the bill that says the province may take actions to protect the red seal. We think that this needs to be much stronger than it currently is because the red seal program is indeed a good program.

I want to talk about the potential difficulties that may arise here. This is a very broad bill. It is a bill that is far more complex than one would initially think in looking at it. We as a province, as I said, pass many laws, and this bill may be so broad as to be incompatible with some of the other things we are trying to do. Even though we talk about free trade, I know that many of us in this Legislature often engage in debate from all sides of the House, trying to protect our local industries. We try to say that people should buy cars made in North America, particularly cars made in Ontario. We try to talk about giving an advantage to Ontario workers to be able to give their skills, to build the industries and to keep jobs here, and we try to stimulate local economies. The passage of this bill may make that difficult. It may render the arguments to stimulate local economies moot.

1000

There is also the whole problem of maintaining public health care. I want to give the example of NAFTA. When it was passed, it did not come from one province to another but it did come from the United States. There was a company by the name of Centurion Health, who sued, or attempted to sue, the Canadian government and provinces because they were not allowed to move, holus-bolus, their health care centres from the United States into Canada, to provide private health care in a place where the public had deemed that public health care was the norm and what we wanted. They attempted to sue the federal government for \$160 million so they could set up their own chain of private health clinics.

I'm very worried, because that is a public goal that Canadians are almost universally agreed upon. Will the passage of this bill cause us to have to defend other public policies that we have set in place—everything from universal education up to 18, which is public and free, to our public health care, to public housing and all the other laudable things that we often talk about? If someone were to come along and challenge that under the aspects of Bill 175, if it is passed, we need to make sure there are provisions inside so that that will not happen.

In the TILMA article, which was the template for this bill, the article entitled "No Obstacles" reads as follows: "Each party shall ensure that its measures do not operate to restrict or impair trade between or through the territory of the parties, or investment or labour mobility between the parties." That's pretty much which is contained

within the body of the bill. But everything we do in this Legislature affects that provision. If we pass a bill, it will affect the markets. If we pass a bill, it will affect investments. If we pass a bill, it will affect how workers are able to obtain jobs, keep jobs or keep investments flowing in the province of Ontario. I just want to say that the passage of a similar type, which is contained within the body of this bill, will cause very much the same problems that they are experiencing in both British Columbia and Alberta.

I also want to talk about the application of the bill, and I think this is where we really need to sit down with our municipal partners. We really need to sit down with the MUSH sector.

Hon. Jim Watson: Peter, I think Colonel Sanders is looking for you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think there's a great deal of levity here.

We need to sit down with our municipal partners, because this bill will have a very broad impact, not only with municipalities, towns and cities across this province but also with the regions. It will have a very broad impact on the MUSH sector. As I understand it, what will be included under Bill 175 are "departments, ministries, agencies, boards, councils, committees, commissions ... agencies of government." It will involve "crown corporations, government-owned commercial enterprises, and other entities that are owned or controlled by the party through ownership interest," it will involve "regional, local, district or other forms of municipal government," it will involve "school boards, publicly funded academic, health and social service entities," and it will involve "non-governmental bodies that exercise authority delegated by law." These are a lot of people who make a lot of decisions for the public good. They have contracts, they seek workers, they buy goods, they buy services, and it will impact a lot of them.

I know some of the problems that were inherent in Alberta and British Columbia when they came up with the first TIMLA will be borne out here. Some of the same requests will be made; some of the same dichotomy we are going to have to resolve will have to be resolved. Just to tell you what some of those were, in both Alberta and British Columbia, municipal government associations sought exclusions because they felt that it was going to be very problematic for them in handling their day-to-day affairs once that law came into effect. The same things are going to happen here in Ontario. They requested, I think, not unreasonable things that were all turned down under the body of the law, and I think we ought not to make the same mistake in Ontario.

First and foremost, municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals and government institutions asked to be free to give a local option; that is, to hire locally whenever possible to carry out the goods and services that were going to be required in the building of a hospital or a school—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Speaker, I'm having a hard time even hearing myself here. I don't know whether—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I agree with the member from Beaches–East York. The conversation level is getting a bit high, and I would ask those who need to carry on those conversations to do so in the lobbies, or whisper. Thank you.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Hon. Jim Watson: Michael, we weren't missing anything.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much. My friends on both sides of the House are assuring me they're not missing anything, but I'm not sure that's entirely true.

What we are asking is that when we're dealing with municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals, government agencies and non-governmental bodies that will be impacted by this law, we look at what their needs are. If a municipality, a school or a hospital wants to hire locally in order to get good service from people who understand the circumstances locally; particularly in times of high unemployment, if you want to go out and find a construction crew in your neighbourhood that is hugely underemployed—they may not be allowed to do so anymore. They asked for an exemption in order to carry that out, and it was not granted in Alberta and British Columbia. I think it's the kind of exemption, although I know it runs contrary to the main purport of the bill, that needs to be looked at, and that we need to look at it.

The second thing is, they asked for the authority not to be sued for damages under the provisions of the bill by people who were unhappy that they were not considered in contract negotiations. They were not granted that. Therefore, municipalities and the whole broad MUSH sector in both British Columbia and Alberta are subject to being sued for damages for the entire legal costs that may result from this. They are often not equipped to have that amount of money to defend themselves.

The third thing is that they are not allowed, even under the provisions of that bill, and certainly I have not seen anything in this bill, to defend their own actions, because this is a provincial responsibility. So a municipality, a university, a school, a hospital or a non-government agency cannot even defend their own actions. We haven't seen that because of course this will likely come in the regulations, but we want to make sure that we don't make that same mistake. If somebody is acting in good faith, they should be allowed to defend themselves when and if the matter is taken to court.

Last but not least, the government does not allow the ability to prevent frivolous and vexatious actions when someone seeks to challenge municipalities, universities, schools or hospitals. It cannot simply be dismissed out of hand as being frivolous or vexatious. The municipalities in both Alberta and British Columbia asked for this safeguard and did not get it. What I am saying to this House today is that if we proceed with this, we should make sure that we are protecting our partners. I hear very often in this House, particularly from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that these are our partners and that we

respect our partners. Well, I think we should respect them, and I think we should make sure that, in the passage of this bill, we are going to do everything reasonably practicable to make sure that people are protected and municipalities are protected against vexatious actions and to make sure that they can make their own decisions. Because, clearly, that was the whole intent of the acts that we have passed—the Municipal Act—to free up municipalities to make their own decisions and to do what is best for their own citizens. That was the purport and the intent of the City of Toronto Act when it was passed—although, I must say, I am a little aggrieved that the minister saw fit to take away Toronto's right to license cab drivers.

But in any event, we need to make that kind of decision as a Legislature before we proceed with the bill as to exactly how it is going to set out and impact whole broad sectors, whether those broad sectors are the red seal, whether it's recognizing credentials in other provinces or other countries, whether it is the freedom of trade, whether it is the municipalities, whether it is going to impact in any way upon the Constitution of this country, or whether it is going to override literally every other law.

I am asking, and I think this is really all I have to say on it today, that we exercise some extreme caution, that we send this to committee, that we allow a great deal of time in committee to hear from experts in law—and I have been given some papers, expertise from lawyers at Sack Goldblatt and others, talking about the pitfalls that have befallen both British Columbia and Alberta and the pitfalls that are being experienced in other parts of the country as we try to exercise freer trade—that we take some considerable time to look at this, that we get it right and that we ensure that no one in Ontario, particularly our municipalities, is hurt in the exercise of this.

Do New Democrats welcome freer trade? Yes, we do. Do we welcome it at the cost of what we have, as a society, built up for 100 years? No, we may not. Do we want to protect such vital things as our public health system, our education system, the universality of what we try to do for the people of Ontario? Those must never be put on a lesser playing field than free trade.

So when this bill goes through, I ask that some caution be made, because we have much to protect and we have much to lose. This bill has only a little modicum of change to gain, because everything that is really important is already contained within the Constitution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to the standing orders, this House will recess until 10:30 of the clock.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.
The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.*

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to introduce members of Professional Engineers Ontario. That's the regulatory body for engineers here in Ontario. They look

after 72,000 engineers and they've put in 87 years as a self-regulating profession: Kim Allen, the chief executive officer and registrar; Diane Freeman, the president-elect; and Donald Wallace, the executive director of the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy.

There's a reception at the end of the day, and I encourage all members to attend the reception hosted by PEO.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today I would like to introduce Ms. Camille Gooden, who is from the Ministry of Health Promotion.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce visitors from the yellow shirt brigade—they're easy to pick out—who are protesting the closure of the emergency department at Douglas Memorial Hospital. They are: Susan Salzer, Donna Frankson, Anne Kranics, Anne Marie Noyes, Wayne Gates, Marilyn Athoe, Doris Emerson, Joy Russell, June Robertson, Nancy Richer, Pat Schofield, Fiona McMurrin, Samantha McMurrin, as well as Marg Ferland. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Parkdale–High Park and page Helen Lee, we would like to welcome her mother, Alison, her father, David, her grandmother Beth and her grandfather Bob, sitting in the public galleries today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

There being no further introductions—oh, my apologies. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to introduce members of my staff from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities who are up there. As part of their professional development, they're here to see question period today. I'd like to welcome them and thank them for all their hard work in the ministry.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question for the Premier about his summer of scandal: Premier, a very disturbing story has emerged involving the conduct of your finance minister and a senior staffer in the Premier's office surrounding the OLG expense scandal. In this case, the Canadian Press reports that Minister Duncan ordered then-CEO Kelly McDougald to find some "scapegoats" to blame for expenses, some political pawns for the McGuinty government to hide behind. Ms. McDougald refused and was fired.

Premier did you or your assistant chief of staff direct Minister Duncan to make this ultimatum?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question—*Interruption.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. We certainly welcome all of our guests here, but I ask

that you just observe and not participate in the proceedings, as much as you may wish to.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I think my honourable colleague is very much aware that the matters he is raising are now the subject of litigation in court. There will be representations made by both sides through their counsel. We intend to respect that process, so I cannot speak directly to those kinds of issues.

But I am pleased to say that we continue to take steps to improve accountability when it comes to our agencies, boards and commissions, including an announcement I made earlier today that we'll be later introducing a bill in this House that will give authority for the first time to the Integrity Commissioner to review the expenses for our senior executives at our 22 biggest agencies, boards and commissions, which I think will be very effective in heightening accountability and transparency and better protecting the interests of taxpayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, these are very serious allegations about the true conduct of the McGuinty government behind closed doors, a McGuinty government who, it seems, has an instinct to duck behind any convenient political shield it can find, a government willing to put anyone's head on a stick as long as it's not their own.

This goes right to the core of the accountability of your government. On behalf of Ontario taxpayers, we need to shine a light on exactly what transpired with the OLGCA before those expenses were released. Premier, will you release by the end of the day Ms. McDougald's complete phone BlackBerry schedule and any other information pertaining to her meetings with the finance minister and members of your office?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There's one particular word used by my colleague in his question that is a very important word and that properly characterizes what we are talking about here. He made reference to "allegations." Again, I would remind my honourable colleague—and I'm sure he is very much aware of this and in agreement with this—that there is a process that is about to unfold through our courts. I think we ought to allow due process to unfold.

In the meantime, that will not stop our government from taking any and all appropriate steps to ensure that we enhance accountability, particularly among our agencies, boards and commissions. We have worked very hard in the past to ensure that all cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants and political staff have their expenses now vetted through the Integrity Commissioner, and because of the change we're making today, for the first time our senior execs at our 22 biggest agencies, boards and commissions will now have to have their expenses reviewed by the same Integrity Commissioner.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, these are very serious allegations that you seem to show no interest in addressing. It's unfortunate that your instinct when cornered during

the summer of scandal is to stonewall. Over at eHealth, you hid behind a PWC study that not only never happened, but we found out later was never contracted in the first place; you want a staff of nine at the Integrity Commissioner's office to sift through up to one million expense reports because the ministers are not up to the job; and now, Premier, you're setting up taxpayers for an \$8-million lawsuit because of your mismanagement. The pattern is alarming.

Premier, simply getting rid of a minister will set a tone and won't cost taxpayers a dime. Will you do it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that it's important for us to draw a distinction between the interest of my honourable colleague and what I think Ontarians really want us to do. I think they want us to do whatever is necessary to heighten accountability, particularly among our agencies, boards and commissions. That is not something I think, in fairness, that governments of any political stripe have really turned their minds to in the past. We are doing this now for the very first time, looking at those 615 arm's-length agencies, boards and commissions, at the thousands and thousands of people who work there and at their expenditures. That's what we're doing. That's why we're putting in place new rules to ensure that there's more transparency and more accountability. I think that's in keeping with public expectations.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you've set a disturbing pattern of saying things here in the House, in the precinct, that we find out later are not in keeping with the facts. Yesterday, with some fanfare at your morning press conference, you announced that Michael Ignatieff and the federal Liberal Party supported your HST sales tax grab. Then late last night, you were forced to back-track and sent out a retraction. Your retraction indicated that your claim hours earlier just wasn't true.

Premier, why did you tell Ontario families that Mr. Ignatieff supported your tax grab when it just wasn't true?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I have been waiting with bated breath for some time now for the leader of the official opposition to put to me a question about the single sales tax, because our position on the single sales tax is very apparent, very clear, very forthright for Ontarians to understand.

What Ontarians really want to know, when it comes to the single sales tax, is whether or not my honourable colleague has the courage of his convictions and whether he's prepared to stand up here and now and commit to repealing the single sales tax should he earn the privilege of serving Ontarians in government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The clock is stopped. I would appreciate everyone listening to the question.

Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, that is your second misunderstanding in as many days. First, the Premier said it was a misunderstanding when he told members of the House that PricewaterhouseCoopers was retained when they in fact were not. Now you have a potential \$4.3-billion misunderstanding with Mr. Ignatieff.

Taxpayers should be able to bank on the credibility of the Premier. Your HST tax grab is nothing but a greedy play on the pocketbooks of working families and seniors in the province of Ontario.

Premier, I ask you: Why is it that when the heat is on, you tend to say things that just aren't true?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I withdraw—not in keeping with the facts.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Try as he might, my honourable colleague cannot wriggle off this hook. He tells us that he is adamantly opposed to the single sales tax. He tells us that it will wreak havoc on Ontarians. He tells us that it will hurt our families. He tells us that it will hurt our businesses. He tells us that it will hurt our seniors. He tells us that it will hurt renters, condominium owners, first-time homebuyers and sports enthusiasts. He tells us that it will do all those things, but he is not prepared to stand up and commit, here and now, that once we move ahead with a single sales tax—because we believe it's the right thing to do for Ontarians—that he's prepared to repeal it.

I'm giving him another opportunity: Is he prepared to have the courage of his convictions and say that, should he earn the privilege of serving Ontarians as the Premier, he will repeal the single sales tax in Ontario?

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you're the one putting the hook to taxpayers, middle-class families—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's terrible on both sides. I would just appreciate some co-operation, because I would like to be able to hear the questions and the answers, and I find it very difficult with members from both sides shouting down the opposite sides.

Mr. Tim Hudak: This isn't the first time, and I'm sure it won't be the last, that the Premier tried to fool Ontario families about a massive tax grab.

Canadian Press quoted you in the heat of the 1999 election campaign saying that you opposed harmonization of the GST and PST. You said that combining these taxes would lead to a net tax increase for Ontario families.

Premier, what changed? Why were you against it then but are all in favour of your greedy tax grab today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we're having a very important debate in this Legislature. I think it's an important opportunity for Ontarians to understand what the two sides are.

The people of Ontario could be forgiven for being confused by the position being put forward by the Conservative Party here in Ontario, because they are telling us that they are opposed to the single sales tax, again they are telling us it will wreak havoc both on our families and our economy, that it's not in the interest of our future, and they are going to do everything they possibly can to stop it. But they are not prepared to take the next step and say—once this becomes law in Ontario, once we have this in place in our businesses, and our families are operating on that premise, they are not prepared to stand up and commit to repealing it. And I put it to my colleague—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, leave it running.

New question, the leader of the third party.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier and it is a very simple question. Why did the Premier's assistant chief of staff attend a meeting to discuss how to handle a freedom-of-information request about questionable expenses at the OLG?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has moved in a variety of ways to address the very real issues of expenses and to ensure that the public has full accountability of our agencies, boards and commissions. Those steps are important. It is important that Ontarians understand all the issues surrounding a range of agencies. We have taken steps, and my colleague the Minister of Government Services will be introducing legislation today to go further to make sure Ontarians can have the confidence that their agencies, boards and commissions are being well managed and will continue to defend the taxpayers of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This appears to be political interference of the highest order, with direct connections right back to the Premier's office. Clearly, he and his office were desperately trying to manage their way out of yet another expense scandal that was breaking in the province. My question: Does the Premier think it is appropriate for his office to be directly involved in screening and managing freedom-of-information requests sent into government agencies?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There has been a statement of allegations with respect to events that transpired. We will respond to that in due course and in an appropriate fashion.

What I can say to the leader of the third party is this: Our government is committed to protecting taxpayer interests. Our government is committed to ensuring maximum accountability, maximum transparency with re-

spect to the operations of our agencies, boards and commissions, and we will continue on the path to ensure that Ontarians can have greater confidence and that our agencies, boards and commissions continue—or begin, in some cases—to provide that accountability and that transparency. That’s what the people of Ontario want, that is what’s important to the government, and that’s what is important to the agencies and those that depend on the success of those operations for their funding.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s interesting, because just yesterday this same Premier boasted that his government has “truly enhanced transparency and accountability in the province of Ontario.” The only thing that this Premier and his gang of political spin doctors have done is call into question the very integrity of the FOI process in this province. Ontarians may very well have access to the FOI process, as the Premier likes to claim, but will he now acknowledge that the only information they will ever receive for as long as he is the Premier here in this province is information that his office has scrutinized and sanitized first?

1050

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the leader of the New Democratic Party that the Information and Privacy Commissioner’s report last year indicated that our ministry had a 94.3% compliance rate within 30 days on FOIs. Our interest is to make information public as quickly as possible, and we will continue to do that following the processes that have been laid out.

We will also go beyond and will continue to build on accountability and transparency measures throughout the government agencies, as the Premier has indicated. We think those are the appropriate steps. We’ve brought freedom of information and accountability to Hydro One and OPG, which was strictly forbidden. We have extended the rules on a whole range of issues. These are the appropriate steps. That’s what taxpayers expect, and that’s what we’ll continue to deliver.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This question is to the Premier, as well.

Yesterday the Premier stated decisively, “We have secured Mr. Ignatieff’s commitment to moving ahead with the” harmonized sales tax. But later in the day, John McCallum, the federal Liberal finance critic, stated just as decisively that there is no deal. How does the Premier explain this contradiction?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am confident that over time the federal Liberal Party will be very clear in terms of its support for the single sales tax in the province of Ontario and our efforts to bring it into being here, and I’m confident that any objective observer will understand how important it is for us to move ahead with this. If you take a look at what has happened around the world, in 130 other countries—it’s a prerequisite to join the EU.

Countries like Germany, Japan, Italy and Norway all have had this in place for an extended period of time now. We’ve just got to get into the game and give our businesses the same advantage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Unfortunately for the Premier, everyone is scrambling to distance themselves from his unfair tax scheme. As one Liberal MP put it yesterday, “It’s absolutely inappropriate and cruel ... to be pushing harmonization in the middle of a deep recession when people are in economic difficulty.”

The Premier plans to make life more expensive in this scheme—and it will also lose jobs in the province of Ontario.

Why did the Premier think he had support for this scheme, and does he think that “inappropriate and cruel” is actually a complimentary term?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I do recall the comments offered by Pat Capponi, who leads the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction. She said the following: “This budget has moved the bar forward on housing, tax credits and child benefits in ways that will make a tangible difference in the lives of many Ontarians.”

We’ve been particularly concerned about ensuring that our budget reflects the challenges faced by our low-income families. That’s why we have a tax credit in place. It will be the largest of its kind in Canada. That’s why we’ve enhanced the Ontario child benefit as well. That’s why we’ve increased our property tax benefits for seniors and low-income families. I think that represents a comprehensive approach, a sensitive approach, to the challenges faced by our low-income families.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What the people of Ontario want is for their government to be worried about affordability in this province. They want a government that’s concerned about helping them get a job in these tough economic times.

The HST scheme makes life more expensive and will kill up to 40,000 jobs in this province, according to a report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The federal Liberal finance critic, John McCallum, says this: “One can certainly debate whether the implementation of a tax of this kind in the middle of a recession is sound public policy.” His colleagues just call it “cruel.”

In the face of growing opposition, why does this Premier insist on shoving the HST down the throats of Ontarians at the precise time when they can least afford it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to quote Gail Nyberg of the Daily Bread Food Bank. She said the following: “If you’re a low-income Ontarian this is a positive budget, and I congratulate the government on recognizing that you can fight poverty and stimulate the economic scene at the same time. When you start to think about an extra \$42 per month per child and start to look at the one-time money coming back and the permanency of the tax credit, the harmonization tax credit, this will make some

tangible difference—an extra \$100 in these folks' pockets is the difference between going to food banks and not going to food banks. We couldn't be happier and we congratulate this budget, and this government on continuing the fight."

I think that pretty well says it all.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Premier. On Monday Premier McGuinty assembled the media to say that he had a plan to fix the lavish expense problems at OLG. Now there's more evidence that it was nothing more than a PR stunt and the Premier doesn't really have a plan. Premier, were the so-called accountability measures you introduced nothing more than your plan B for dealing with the summer of scandal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the things that is part of that approach, that drive to enhance accountability among our agencies, boards and commissions, consists of a bill that we'll be introducing later today, and I look forward to my colleague's support in that regard.

What we are going to do for the first time in Ontario is ensure that the Integrity Commissioner has the authority to review expenses for the senior execs in our ABCs. In particular, she'll be given the authority to take a look at expenses that have come from the boards of directors, from the CEO, from senior management, and then the five biggest spenders within any organization, no matter what job they might happen to hold.

We think that's a step forward, and I look forward to my colleague's support for that new initiative that will enhance accountability among our ABCs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Again, for the Premier: It appears it was only after McDougald refused to take part in your PR scheme that the Premier's office kicked into high gear and cobbled together plan B—again, a hastily-called news conference and an announcement that an office of nine people will begin screening the expenses of 80,000 employees.

Premier, the pattern is alarming. The time is long overdue for you to do the right thing. Will Premier McGuinty come clean with Ontarians, stop the desperate PR schemes and kill the scandals by holding a cabinet minister in his government accountable?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Obviously I'm going to take issue with my friend's categorization of these as PR schemes. I would ask him whether or not he's going to support our efforts, through this bill, to give new authority to the Integrity Commissioner to take a look at the expenses of our senior executives in our agencies, boards and commissions. I would ask him whether he's going to support our initiative to require that the expenses of our senior execs at our agencies, boards and commissions be posted online. We think that's the appropriate thing to do. We're also going to require that cabinet ministers' expenses and senior execs' within the Ontario public service be posted online. Now, he might call those "public

relations," but I think they're progressive steps forward. Again, I would ask for his support.

AUTISM TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse. On World Autism Awareness Day, the minister sang the praises of the Geneva Centre for Autism. The minister said, "Since 1986, the centre has been bringing together professionals, educators, parents and researchers from around the world." Well, Minister, this summer, that centre sent a letter out to the parents, telling them that they need to close their services from August 31 to September 4, 2009.

Minister, can you explain why this centre had to close its doors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to look further into that particular issue.

On the question of autism, I tell you that one of the great privileges I have had is to get to know some of the families with children with autism. I can assure you that we are doing everything we can to improve services for kids with autism. We have tripled funding for IBI therapy and autism services. The Minister of Education and I are working very, very closely to make sure that schools are welcoming places for children with autism.

We are working hard to improve this and we will continue our hard work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, the Geneva Centre had to close for a week because it had no choice to balance their budget.

Let me quote from the letter. They go, "Due to a freeze in government funding ... we will be closing our services and requiring staff to take time off without pay for those days," rather than having staff laid off. "During the shutdown periods, there will be no services delivered."

Minister, is it acceptable that this centre finds itself with no other choice but to close its doors for a week in order to balance their budget?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said in the initial question, I will look into that particular situation. We do fund organizations to deliver IBI therapy. They work within that envelope to provide service in the way that best suits those families. As I said, in that particular case, I will look into seeing what happened, but different organizations do manage differently, and if that was the decision they took I will look into that particular case.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Our province, like many other jurisdictions around the world, is currently feeling the negative effects of the ongoing global economic downturn. The people in my community are

worried. Job security is a top concern for my constituents and, quite frankly, Ontarians across the province.

As a result of the current global economic crisis, a number of key sectors in the province, for instance the high-tech sector in Ottawa, have experienced a downturn and for reasons out of their control have had to scale back in order to remain afloat. My constituents are concerned not only about the security of their own jobs and the welfare of their families, but also for their neighbours. So I ask the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: What is your ministry doing to create jobs in this province and to keep Ontarians working?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very pleased to accept this question from the member for Ottawa Centre, who has been instrumental in helping us discuss with our businesses in the Ottawa region how we can be helpful to them. I appreciate his hard work on behalf of his own constituents.

Let me say that over the course of these last few years, the Ontario government has gotten back into the business of helping our companies become more competitive on the world stage. Perfect examples of this are the Next Generation of Jobs Fund—\$1.6 billion of investment has resulted from just the first couple of years of this fund; and our advanced manufacturing program, where an over \$100-million commitment in loans by us has leveraged over \$900 million in investments by the private sector. Likewise, a new program, the eastern Ontario development fund, which this member knows very well, has leveraged all kinds of jobs for small communities in eastern Ontario, which we know has seen—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Minister, it is reassuring to know that the province has programs in place to create and maintain jobs, considering the current economic conditions.

You have made mention of a number of programs and initiatives established by this government, aimed at creating and maintaining jobs in the province, to which a large amount of funds are allocated. In these tough economic times, it becomes increasingly more important to show results when government funds are concerned and people's jobs are at stake.

Minister, could you provide this House and Ontarians with examples of how your ministry is putting taxpayers' dollars to work for them, their families and their neighbours, especially in eastern Ontario?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: We've had some great examples of announcements throughout the summer months that I think show that our programs are working, and we're encouraging those companies to invest. Electrovaya, right here outside of the GTA, is creating new and improved batteries for use in electric vehicles and is taking their product worldwide. It's the perfect Ontario story. And in Hamilton, Karma Candy: We advanced an expansion of their production so that Karma Candy can hire more people and make great products for export, candy in this case. And in eastern Ontario, we've

got a great company, HRose Machining, creating 14 new jobs over the next few years in Carleton Place. That's an important example of how small business can negotiate with government and we can help them grow in important parts of our province.

So we appreciate the support from all members to help promote our programs that are helping businesses exceed and succeed.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Premier: What we've witnessed here today in question period is a Premier so desperate to change the channel on his summer of scandal and his tax hikes that he has started asking his own questions like he's the leader of the official opposition.

So I have a question today for the Premier—he's had several times to answer the question. Why did you say Michael Ignatieff supported your HST plan when he said no such thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am more than prepared to talk about our position on the single sales tax. We've been very clear on this. We have initiated this. We have sought and obtained the support of the federal government when it comes to moving ahead with the single sales tax. We believe that it is the single most important thing that we can do to strengthen this economy, put us on a stronger footing so we can create more jobs and support our public services. That's where we stand: four-square behind the single sales tax.

What Ontarians continue to be confused about is the Conservative Party position, and they're wondering why, if they are so opposed to it, they're not prepared to commit to repealing it. I give my colleague the opportunity now, which her leader rejected, to inject some clarity into their position on the single sales tax in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The Premier had so much fun in his seven years as leader of the official opposition, I can't wait to welcome him back to this place in two years.

If the single sales tax was so important to him in 1999, then why did he say he opposed the HST, because it's going to be a net increase in taxes to Ontarians? You told us it would hurt Ontarians in 1999. What has changed? Your skyrocketing deficit? Your scandalous spending? Your mismanagement of taxpayer dollars? Please tell us what has changed.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Given the passion and the enthusiasm that they bring to this debate, and certainly the volume as well, the logical inference would be that they're going to do everything they can not only to stop it but, given the opportunity, they will instantly repeal it. I would expect that to be the very top of their platform: "We will repeal the single sales tax in the province of Ontario." It's just a suggestion on my part. I'm sure they're going to want to take it into account.

Again I ask my colleague if she might inject at least a little bit of clarity into this debate for the people of Ontario. Will they now stand up and commit to repealing the single sales tax in the province of Ontario?

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. For the past six years, the Premier has been forcing public school boards to defer millions of dollars of badly needed maintenance spending to compensate for his government's inadequate funding. Public schools need new plumbing, heating, computer rooms, science labs, gyms and fields, yet recently, the McGuinty government handed over \$250,000 to a private academy in Collingwood for a new field. Is the Premier telling us that he couldn't find a school anywhere in the Ontario public education system that could use that money?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm privileged on the part of our government to work with government ministries on matters of infrastructure, on the matter at hand that the member speaks about related to the upkeep of our schools. That's why our government's budget initiative, with substantial new investment for economic stimulus, brought 700 million new dollars to the floor for the renovation of schools in the province of Ontario.

A further initiative in partnership with the government of Canada saw us support hundreds of unique recreation infrastructure projects across the province of Ontario, and in the circumstances that the honourable member raises, with the Pretty River Academy in Collingwood, with support from the town of Collingwood we helped to provide some resources for a soccer field—a soccer field which will offer guaranteed access to the public in all of those hours when kids need to play soccer, no matter whether they are part and parcel of the academy or just kids from the local community. We think that those are sound investments, in partnership with the government of Canada, that are part of a desire to create economic stimulus and to rebuild the important infrastructure of our schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The parents who contacted us have made it very clear that the McGuinty government needs to take a look at its commitment to public education and the Premier needs to get its priorities straight. What does the Premier or the Deputy Premier have to say to parents at Northern Secondary School in Toronto who have been working tirelessly to revitalize their field for the students and the community and have received not one dime from the McGuinty Liberal government?

Hon. George Smitherman: Across the province of Ontario, of course, there are thousands of schools and there are thousands of playing fields as well. The honourable member raises one project, but he doesn't comment on the fact that through investment of government resources in infrastructure initiatives designed to enhance

access to recreational programs, fields and also buildings, hundreds and hundreds of unique projects are being supported. We acknowledge, as the honourable member encourages us, that there are more opportunities to renew recreational infrastructure, and it's nice to at least see the member's acknowledgment that this government has made substantial progress with hundreds of unique projects across the province of Ontario.

1110

TAXATION

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. I've been talking with constituents over the summer, and many of them have come to me with concerns regarding the harmonized sales tax. They've heard statements by the opposition that things such as food are going to be subject to HST. My understanding of how the HST is going to work is that items which are currently subject to GST will also be subject to HST. But with the help of \$4.3 billion in transitional payments from the federal government, our government has exempted a number of items, including children's clothing, diapers and feminine hygiene products.

When I go to buy food at the grocery store, the vast majority of my purchases charge no GST at all. If this is the case, is what the opposition parties are claiming true? Will all food items be subject to HST?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I thank the member for Willowdale for this important question. Let's just be absolutely clear: When it comes to basic groceries, there will be no harmonized sales tax applied. Today, there is no GST nor PST, and after July 1, there will be no HST on basic food. Those who are trying to scaremonger on this issue should be aware that we are very, very clear on this point.

The most important thing we need to do in the economy right now is to get more people back to work. The way to do that is to ensure that we can compete in the 21st century. We have a tax system that was created in 1961. It is absolutely important that we ensure that we have people back to work to compete for those jobs in the 21st century. We will indeed modernize our tax system to ensure that we can help get people back to work. On this side of the House, we are for it. It's interesting to note that our opponents are opposed to it, but just in a temporary fashion.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, though items in grocery stores are largely exempt from GST and thus HST, I understand that reduced-price meals, which were previously exempt, will be subject to HST. Now, I know that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture supports the HST because they know that farmers will save money. Manufacturers and processors support the HST because it'll make them more competitive and help them to compete. Organizations such as the Daily Bread Food Bank have endorsed this tax reform package. In fact, Gail Nyberg stated that "the permanency of the tax credit, the

harmonization tax credit, this will make some tangible difference—an extra \$100 in these folks' pockets is the difference between going to food banks and not going to food banks.”

Minister, how will the tax reform package help those who will be most affected by any changes in food prices?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to say to the Minister of Finance that he crafted a tax reform package for the province of Ontario that was particularly sensitive to the needs of people who would be impacted the most by any change in our sales tax regime. That's why in our budget it was proposed that we would do a number of things. First, we're going to cut the income tax rate on the first \$36,000 worth of income. That will apply to some 93% of all Ontario taxpayers. We didn't cut the rate at the top; we cut it at the bottom to make sure that those who could value that the most will receive that.

As well, we're enhancing the sales tax credit. Many people in this province receive \$240 from the federal government by way of a GST rebate. We will be adding an additional \$260 a year tax-free, not just for adults, but \$260 for every person in the household, including children. As well—

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

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Over the past six years we've seen many, many examples of this government's indifference to rural- and small-town Ontario. Quite simply, they don't give a hoot about the people who live in the countryside. Today's case in point: their presumptive legislation which excluded part-time or volunteer firefighters. Now the government claims they're for extending the presumptive legislation to include the volunteers, that they're “doing it.” But in a spectacular display of legislative incompetence, the government members voted against the volunteer firefighters in principle when we brought forward a bill in this House last May to fix this problem. Now, another four months have passed, which has added to the two years our volunteers have already waited for equal treatment with their full-time counterparts.

My question is this: No more excuses. When will the minister keep his promise to volunteer firefighters?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. I understand the importance of volunteer and part-time firefighters to communities across this province. I also understand that these volunteer and part-time firefighters do hazardous, life-threatening work. That's why, when we moved on legislation back in May of 2007 to bring forward presumptive legislation for firefighters, within the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act we allowed for a regulation. So we have been consulting with many stakeholders. Just at the last AMO conference, I had an opportunity to meet with many communities.

The next step in this process is that I will be meeting with the new president of the Firefighters Association of

Ontario. This is the representative of volunteer and part-time—

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Each and every day we witness the McGuinty Liberals' destruction of rural Ontario. We see the devastation of agriculture, the closure of rural schools, the small factories and stores boarded up in our rural communities and a severe shortage of family physicians. And yet, when you have an opportunity to help rural Ontario, you fail again. In something as simple as treating volunteer firefighters with respect, providing presumptive legislation equal to their full-time brothers and sisters, you not only delay and ignore your own promises; you even vote against a well-intentioned, non-partisan private member's bill.

Minister, even if you don't support volunteer firefighters, will you at least have some compassion for their families and commit today to providing presumptive legislation to volunteer firefighters by the end of this session?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I said to the member's colleague, I do understand the importance of this matter. That's why I will be meeting in short order with the Firefighters Association of Ontario's new president to discuss this matter. I've had the opportunity to meet with many community leaders from across Ontario.

I understand that there may be some frustration here, but the member has to understand that this consultation with the WSIB and looking at the way that part-time and volunteer firefighters do their work in these fire halls across Ontario is very, very important, so that we get it right. But I can assure the member that we will conclude this review as quickly as possible and get an answer to the member.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. On September 28, Fort Erie will lose its emergency room. Fort Erie's 30,000 residents will join those in Port Colborne who have already lost their ER, and face long travel times and waits in the overburdened ERs in Welland and Niagara Falls. The many people here today—the Ontario Medical Association, the mayor of Fort Erie and the regional council—are all pleading for a moratorium on this closure. Why is the Premier ignoring them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to welcome representatives of the community who are here today. I want to acknowledge that this has been a difficult debate. I understand that there's anxiety that has been created and we all have a tremendous attachment to our local hospitals.

Here at Queen's Park, in downtown Toronto, we have to rely on our local health integration networks and the work that they do to represent the interest of their communities. We have heard from the local health integration network, and their recommendation is that they put in place a 24/7 urgent care centre that will accommodate

fully 95% of the patients who are now going to the hospital in Fort Erie. We think that overall it presents a step forward in improving the quality of care that's available to patients in the community.

I understand that it's difficult and it's controversial, but we believe it's the right thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
1120

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's interesting, because the LHIN has been quoted as saying that they have the full support of the government in making this decision, and now the government is saying that they're just doing whatever the LHIN thinks is supposed to happen. So it's a bit of shell game, in my opinion.

The government created a rural and northern health panel to examine these very kinds of issues, yet the findings of this panel have not yet been released and this government is bulldozing ahead with closures regardless of that. The Premier knows full well that he can intervene—

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —just like his deputy is intervening in my question right now. Instead, he is allowing the health of Niagara residents to be jeopardized with this decision.

Why won't the Premier do the right thing and impose a moratorium on all small, rural and northern hospital closures, at least until the findings of the very panel that they're putting in place have been released?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There was a third party review conducted of this issue by a Dr. Jack Kitts. He said the following: "In critical cases it is vital that patients receive definitive treatment as quickly as possible. The ED at the Douglas Memorial site is unable to provide this service as it lacks the necessary diagnostic equipment and specialist back-up."

Again, we're putting in place an urgent care centre, which will be open on a 24/7 basis, that can accommodate 95% of the patients who are already going to the Douglas Memorial hospital in Fort Erie. The other 5% will be going to a larger hospital with more technology and more expertise so they can provide better care to patients in need of that kind of care.

I understand and I acknowledge that this is a difficult issue. There is tremendous sensitivity associated with your local hospital, but we firmly believe this will improve the quality of care for people in the community.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Members of this House know that food produced by Ontario farmers is among the freshest, safest and best quality in the world. As we have moved forward with our Buy Local strategy, my constituents are more and more aware of the benefits of buying food that is produced right here in Ontario.

In 2008 our government launched the multi-year Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. Buying Ontario produce,

meats, eggs and dairy products supports our local economies in rural Ontario and helps farmers get a price that is fair and reasonable for their hard work.

I recently read an article in the Guelph Mercury about There's No Taste Like Home, a mobile education trailer that was funded under the Ontario market investment fund. Could the minister please share with the House more information about the Ontario market investment fund and what sorts of initiatives could be supported?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to as well just acknowledge the work that you're doing to have the farmers' market on the lawn today. Thanks very much. We encourage members to go. And—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a second. I think I need to make it very clear to all members of the House that this initiative of the farmers' market on the front lawn is an initiative of the Speaker. I do not want it to be taken in or criticized as part of government. This is a Speaker's initiative. Thank you.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Thanks very much, Speaker.

I'm happy that my colleague has asked about the program. It demonstrates the McGuinty government's commitment to continuing to work with our partners in rural Ontario. That is why we have committed \$12 million over three years to invest in partnership initiatives in our rural communities to support farmers—and not just farmers, but the businesses that benefit from their well-being as well. So far, there have been 62 successful projects that have been announced, and we have invested over \$3 million in the Ontario market investment fund.

We are committed to working with our partners in rural Ontario. This is yet another example of how the McGuinty government is working to support rural economies in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I know the farmers in my riding appreciate the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy, as it aims to open up the local market for them and help them get a better return on the hard work and resources they put into it.

Partnerships along the value chain between local producers, processors and grocery chains are crucial to ensure that Ontario demand for Ontario food products is met. Farmers in my riding appreciate the direction that our government has taken in partnering and working closely with them to help address the challenges the sector is facing, while at the same time helping to advance new economic opportunities for farmers through our Buy Local strategy and other initiatives.

The Ontario market investment fund program has been a huge success in my riding. Could the minister please share with the House information on how the OMIF program has benefited other communities in Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Over the course of the summer there have been a number of announcements in ridings right across the province. I want to talk about one

that happened in Renfrew county. That was with regard to Taste of the Valley. The province of Ontario, the McGuinty government, provided \$9,000 to Taste of the Valley, and that was to sponsor events in three communities: Barry's Bay, Arnprior and Cobden.

We've also supported initiatives that have come to us from communities in Haldimand county: the Harvests of Haldimand, local food guides and culinary events. They received \$22,000. We have the Newmarket Main Street Farmers' Market. They brought us a proposal; we were able to provide them with \$5,000 to promote locally grown food. The Savour Muskoka initiative was a \$50,000 grant from the McGuinty government for eight—

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

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Minister of Government Services: Minister, your decision to close privately operated licence offices in the city of Pembroke and the town of Renfrew in of my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will have serious negative repercussions on the people of those communities. Jobs will be lost, businesses will close and, according to everyone I've spoken to, service will be reduced.

Minister, you made this decision without any consultation or due consideration. Will you do the right thing, rescind your decision to close these offices and restore good services to these communities?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I answered this question yesterday too, but let me just repeat this again.

This whole initiative is about increasing services by modernizing our ServiceOntario centres. We are also expanding health card services to all 300 ServiceOntario centres; it is now only available in about 27 centres.

This is about expanding services; this is about increasing services. In rural Ontario alone, services will go from two locations to about 163 locations for health cards. In northern communities it will go from six locations to 67 Ontario centres. It is all about improving services.

We are evaluating the situation. If we feel that in any community the service being provided is not up to the standard of the services being cut, we will evaluate the situation and take steps to make sure that the right services at the right levels in the right communities are being provided.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, you can slice that and dice that and you can spin it any way you want, but it still comes up baloney.

You are going to be closing privately operated offices in the province of Ontario and in communities in my riding. Those offices have consistently been the best-run offices anywhere in Ontario. Whether I talk to average citizens on the street or to auto dealers in my riding, they tell me that your decision will result in reduced services to them and their communities.

I am going to ask you one more time: Will you reverse this ill-considered decision that was made without consultation and restore the proper services to those communities and all the other communities across the province, including those in the Minister of Agriculture's riding, so that we get good services in our licence bureaus?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the member was very, very emotional and I'm not sure I really got what he was saying.

Let me just quote what he said before. When we announced this initiative in July, here is what the member said. He said: "It just makes sense ... I'm pleased that after six years the government is listening with respect to amalgamating these services under one roof.... This is a positive announcement." It's the same member who said this.

On September 28, 2008, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said: "We have driver licence issuing offices throughout the area that are equipped with the staff, cameras and the secure computer system that could easily handle the issuance of health cards in the same effective and timely manner as they do driver licences"—

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

1130

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. As you know, the Clarkson airshed in Mississauga is stressed, it's polluted, and yet your government insists on building a new gas-fired power plant in that region. Why are you gambling with the health of the people in south Mississauga?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. George Smitherman: To the contrary. First, I think it's important that the honourable member acknowledge that Ontario is moving forward as a jurisdiction in North America to eliminate coal-fired generation. This is a fantastic ambition on behalf of the people of the province. We recently announced that we'll be closing two units at Nanticoke and two units at Lambton, all of which, as an example, are upwind of the area that the member speaks about.

In addition to that, working with the Ministry of the Environment, local officials and the MPPs in the area, we're generating the capacity to look for offsets of emissions in the very same airshed, making progress on a continual basis to improve the quality of air for people not just in that part of our province but indeed all across Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, your minister speaks about the need for investment in conservation and renewable power, but when it comes down to the crunch, in an area where the air quality is overtaxed, we don't have a plan for substantial investment in renewable power or

conservation. What we do have is people who are breathing air that is already over-polluted by your standards.

Why is your government not bringing forward a plan to deal with the power demand in that area with an aggressive conservation and renewable plan? Why aren't you doing that?

Hon. George Smitherman: I encourage the honourable member to actually read up on the subject, because he has missed a couple of important points. First and foremost, the Green Energy Act entitles project proponents from the First Nations and Metis communities all across the breadth of the province to initiate renewable energy initiatives, and the honourable member knows that very well.

I think what he has missed is that we will be moving forward—the ministry and the Ontario Power Authority, in partnership with the Ministry of the Environment and all local players—to address offsets in the very same airshed through aggressive conservation and energy efficiency initiatives that are targeted at specific companies that are producing electricity for their own needs and creating emissions in that very same airshed.

This is something that has never been done in the province of Ontario, that was won because of the hard-fought efforts of local representatives, and stands to be a model that can improve circumstances when we do have airsheds that need some additional efforts. This is exactly the conservation and energy efficiency—

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

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

There is no doubt that families are being hit hard by the economic times we are facing. I am hearing often from families who have lost their jobs or had their hours reduced at work and are struggling to make ends meet.

These days kids are going back to school, and families are trying their best to create a good environment for their kids to be able to study, and especially to provide clothes and food.

Minister, can you tell us what you're doing to support low-income families' efforts to provide for themselves?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank my colleague for the question and for his ongoing passion and interest in this issue.

We know that parents want the very best for their kids and that they work very hard to provide them with every possible opportunity. But these economic times are putting more pressure on families and now, more than ever, they need a little extra help. That's why this past July we almost doubled the Ontario child benefit, increasing it to \$1,100 per child per year, two years ahead of schedule. This extra support means that parents won't have to choose between feeding the kids and paying the rent. It means that some kids will now have the oppor-

tunity to participate in sports and music lessons. Those things can enrich a child's life chances.

We're making real progress. Under our strategy, a single parent with two kids, working full-time, will have an increase in their income—

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: There has been a lot of talk lately about the impact of these economic times on the ability of families to provide nutritious food. For instance, we know that food bank use is up in communities across the province of Ontario. Just this summer, the Daily Bread Food Bank reported that usage in the GTA hit over a million users.

Can the minister tell us what she's doing to support those families, and especially to support students when they go to school—for nutrition, to give them the ability to study?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I was saying, under our strategy, a single parent with two kids, working full-time, will see an increase in their income of 54% since we were elected in 2003. That's \$10,000 more to spend on those things that will help their kids be the very best they can be.

When it comes to nutrition, we know that kids learn better when they've had a healthy breakfast or a healthy snack. That's why we've expanded student nutrition. We've quadrupled funding for student nutrition. Last year alone, we doubled the funding for this program. It means that that program is now serving over 400,000 kids. It allowed us to enhance 300 programs; it allowed us to create 700 new programs.

But we don't do this alone; we do this in partnership with communities, with businesses, with service clubs, with schools. Working together, we really can achieve our target of reducing the number of kids in poverty by 25% over the next five—

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

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity to remind members of a ruling that I made back in June, and it made reference to standing order 37(d), dealing with oral questions:

"In putting an oral question, no argument or opinion is to be offered nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question, the member is not to debate the matter to which it refers."

In that June 4 ruling, I indicated that there were certain general principles governing the form and content of questions, and at that time I asked for greater observance of those principles. The crux of that ruling was that, to begin with, while there may be many other motives, the primary purpose for asking a question is to extract information from the government and to call it to account. Specific to that point of order at the time, questions

should not be hypothetical or merely seeking to elicit an opinion from a minister of the crown.

I would just ask that all members be conscious of that, and perhaps it is an issue, I would say to the government House leader, that you may want to have a discussion about with the other two House leaders at a House leaders' meeting. I have observed some expressions from the two House leaders today, and I think it may be a good thing to have that discussion on 37(d).

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, please, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your comments.

On behalf of the New Democrats, we are calling upon you to invoke standing order 37(a) and (d). It will require some discipline amongst all of us. You've been very successful at ensuring that questions are put in the third person through the Speaker. You won that one. I'm asking you to please help us win compliance with 37, especially (a) and (d).

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Leeds–Grenville on the same point of order.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There was a brief discussion on this subject at the House leaders' meeting earlier today. I think we all concur that the rules should be complied with and look to you for your guidance in this matter.

I think we can certainly encourage the membership of all three caucuses in our roles as House leaders to meet that standard. But I think ultimately, as you know, it's your objective approach to the matters that are dealt with in this House that we all depend on at the end of the day.

Speaker, I want to indicate to you—obviously, I have in the past—my admiration for the way you've conducted business since assuming that chair.

We will encourage our members to follow as closely as possible. We know there are occasions when you are going to have to show discretion, and we appreciate and understand that. But I share the concern that my colleague in the NDP has expressed as well, that we've seen question period in some respects, in terms of compliance with this rule, deteriorate significantly.

We encourage your, I guess, stricter insurance of the rules, and we will do what we can, from our caucus's perspective, to ensure that we can assist you in that matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: At the risk of standing between our colleagues and the farmers' market, let me just say that we did discuss this in our House leaders' meeting this morning. I did have the opportunity to raise it with you. I appreciate you raising it here in the House. All three House leaders, I think, have indicated that we will all undertake to work with our caucuses to adhere more strictly to the standing orders and the rules as they are applied.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate that the issue will be looked at. I would just say that one of the challenges I have as Speaker is when I recognize a member and it starts as a question and it becomes, in

many ways, a bit of a member's statement, but then it often comes around to actually being that question. I think it's often that content from the beginning, from the moment the member stands up to that question, that is causing some difficulty. But I would appreciate the co-operation of all members in dealing with that.

I would just also like to remind the members that there is a farmers' market on the front lawn of Queen's Park today. There is some wonderful Ontario product for sale, and I would encourage you to go out and visit and do some of your fall shopping now; particularly, there are some great Ontario apples out there.

With that, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have the great pleasure to introduce to the House a very special delegation from the People's Republic of China. The delegation is headed by Mr. Bing Lu, a member of the standing committee of the Chinese national congress. With him is Mr. Mingwu Huo, who is the consul of the People's Republic of China; and our liaison officer, Dr. John Hui. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LOUIS BRAILLE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the anniversary of a champion and innovator for visually impaired people across the world, Louis Braille. This summer marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille.

Louis was blinded at the age of three during an accident. By the age of 15, he created a reading system we have come to know as Braille. Braille is a tactile system of six raised dots, representing letters of the alphabet, which is widely in use today as an effective means of communications for the visually impaired.

For people with vision loss, Braille is the key to literacy, leading to successful employment and independence. It provides the tools to read and write independently, and helps build skills in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Braille can be found almost anywhere that print is found: on restaurant menus, ATM keyboards, business cards, textbooks and sheet music. Today, Braille has been adapted to every known language in countries around the world.

How unfortunate, then, that the McGuinty Liberals' tax grab means that books for the blind will be taxed under the HST, starting next July 1.

The impact that Louis Braille has had on communications for the visually impaired is immeasurable. Thank you, Louis Braille. The possibilities are endless.

WALK A MILE IN HER SHOES

Mr. Pat Hoy: Last Sunday, I participated in Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, inspired by the old saying, “You can’t understand a person’s experience until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.”

Men from all walks of life walked one mile in women’s high-heeled shoes to raise awareness and to end violence against women. Fifteen thousand dollars was raised for the Chatham-Kent Women’s Centre. Seventy-five men, including me, walked a mile down King Street in Chatham while wearing red high heels. Although it was a challenging and fun experience, the men in the community came together for a very worthy cause. Proceeds benefited the Chatham-Kent Women’s Centre, their violence prevention efforts and programs for local women and children. The centre supports women and children who are facing violence by providing safe shelter, community outreach, counselling and public education.

All of us have a role to play in ending violence against women. Every day in Ontario, individuals and communities are working hard to end this violence. Our government is committed to protecting women and children from domestic violence. We are providing more than \$208 million this year to protect women from violence and to support victims of abuse. Raising community awareness is critical if we are to achieve our goal of supporting the women and children of this province to experience lives free of violence.

Thank you to the Chatham-Kent Women’s Centre for their tireless hard work and for making Sunday’s event such a huge success.

TOWN OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise to bring to the attention of this House the devastation that was caused by the F2 tornado that touched down in the Town of the Blue Mountains on August 20.

The morning after the storm, I joined Mayor Ellen Anderson on a tour of the damage. Seeing roofs ripped off houses and apple orchards obliterated was overwhelming. Thankfully, the municipal response has been excellent. Following the tour, we met with the local emergency management committee to hear from emergency services personnel.

I want to thank Steve Conn, the town’s emergency management coordinator, for his diligent efforts in helping to direct the local response, and I want to applaud Mayor Anderson, council and municipal staff for their swift response to the storm.

Sadly, Georgian Bay’s apple growers were particularly hard hit. Some 15 farms were damaged, causing at least 4,500,700 pounds of apples to be lost.

I want to thank the Ministers of Agriculture and Natural Resources for touring the area, and I appreciate the assistance of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Today, he notified me and the mayor that he has declared

the affected lands a disaster area, making the town eligible for disaster relief. While this designation is important, it is expected that our apple growers will need extraordinary assistance over and above existing programs and insurance.

I just want to urge the government to continue to work with us so that the Blue Mountains can quickly recover from this storm damage.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Paul Miller: MPP Andrea Horwath’s fight for presumptive legislation for firefighters was clear. It included all full-time, all part-time and all volunteer firefighters. When the government finally acted on her efforts, it did so in a half-hearted measure and a mean-spirited way. It chose to exclude part-time and volunteer firefighters. These firefighters are the lifeline for many communities throughout our province. This government’s exclusion of part-time and volunteer firefighters has been decried by many municipalities, which have adopted resolution after resolution imploring the McGuinty Liberals to fix their error and include part-time and volunteer firefighters.

This huge mistake was highlighted for me by Peter Chaisson, a Stoney Creek firefighter who fought the horrible Chipman chemical plant fire in the late 1970s. Peter never smoked, but is now fighting lung cancer and has been on a dialysis machine for many years—the result of the Chipman fire? Presumably. Peter lives in a nursing home now and has all but been forgotten by the government.

On behalf of Peter and all the other firefighters who have been ignored, forgotten and left uncovered by the McGuinty Liberals, I implore the Premier to finally get it completely right, to move immediately to include all firefighters in the presumptive legislation. Make sure that Peter Chaisson and other part-time and volunteer firefighters finally get the respect, the thanks and the coverage that they truly deserve.

TIM HORTONS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It gives me great pleasure to rise today and talk about one of my favourite topics, something most of us in this House probably enjoyed this morning as well. Yes, I’m talking about Tim Hortons, and I’m proud to say that, once again, Oakville will be the new home of the head office of this Canadian icon. That’s right: This ode to early morning hockey practices, long winter days spent outside and the popularity of the double-double is returning from the United States to its rightful home in this wonderful province.

While many of us applaud this move because we know Tim Hortons rightfully belongs in Ontario, we must recognize an equal truth. The McGuinty Liberals have created a competitive tax structure in this province, and that will encourage more of these moves in the future.

The Tim Hortons board acknowledged that the competitive tax system as a primary motivation for its move back to Ontario. The McGuinty government has taken bold action to reduce the corporate income tax rate to 12% next year, cutting it again to 10% over the next three years. This is going to make Ontario more attractive to businesses and create the jobs of today and for tomorrow.

I have to say that as a proud representative of the community of Oakville, I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to the members of the board of Tim Hortons and to say, "Welcome home to Oakville. Welcome home to Ontario. Welcome back to Canada."

DOUGLAS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. John O'Toole: On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the entire PC caucus, I rise in the Legislature today to recognize and support members of the Fort Erie community who came here today to Queen's Park to fight to save Douglas Memorial Hospital, their hospital in our leader's riding. The Minister of Health needs to intervene or Fort Erie's one and only hospital will lose its emergency room on September 22.

Douglas Memorial Hospital is very near and dear to our leader and our caucus. In fact, our leader, Tim Hudak, was born and raised in Fort Erie. Under Premier Harris, the Ontario PCs stood together with Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Petrolia and many other small communities, including some in my riding, to successfully fight against a similar short-sighted proposal to effectively close rural hospitals.

1510

We were pleased to stand up and join in that fight against this minister and ask for the support of the Ontario Medical Association moratorium to stop health care restructuring decisions until the rural and northern health care panel's reports and recommendations are tabled. The region of Niagara—in fact, all 12 of the region's municipal councils—have adopted and supported this moratorium.

Now it's your turn, Minister. Today Tim Hudak and the entire Ontario PC caucus call on Minister David Caplan to support the emergency services at Douglas Memorial Hospital, and indeed 25 other hospitals which are similarly threatened. All small hospitals in Ontario should feel very threatened under this minister and under this government. Let's put a stop to it now.

BIOREM

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: We're all aware of the problem of climate change and that climate change doesn't simply cease during difficult economic times. That's why it gives me great pleasure to be part of a government that's taking bold action to create green infrastructure, to stimulate the economy and to create jobs. I see this in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga with the McGuinty government's contribution of over \$4

million to our consolidated maintenance facility for solar panels.

Today I highlight the McGuinty government's recent investment of \$1.2 million in Biorem, through the innovation demonstration fund, to bring its air filtration and purification technology to the global market. This funding will help Biorem showcase its Unity technology to customers and investors, including a project at the Preston Wastewater Treatment Facility in Cambridge. It's cutting-edge technology. It will help clean the air we breathe and create the value-added, high-skill jobs of the new knowledge economy. The company anticipates hiring 27 new employees over the next five years, including engineers and mechanical technologists.

While we know there's more to do, this government will continue to work hard to improve and clean the air we breathe and to help create the jobs that we need.

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Ontarians read every day about the impacts of global financial uncertainty. While the worst may well be over, we need to ensure that Ontario businesses emerge stronger, to spur new investment and new jobs so they can produce more, export more and, most importantly, create more jobs.

The McGuinty government has responded with both immediate and long-term tax reforms that will improve the quality of life for all Ontarians by strengthening our economy while providing additional benefits to those who need them most.

We are putting more than \$1.1 billion annually back into the pockets of Ontario's families through permanent, broadly based, personal income tax cuts that will see 93% of Ontario taxpayers pay less in their personal income tax. And to make that transition to the HST as smooth as possible, we're going to give families with less than \$160,000 of net income a year tax-free payments totalling \$1,000, and single persons with less than \$80,000 of net income a year will receive three tax-free payments totalling \$300.

These tax relief initiatives underscore the McGuinty government's commitment to Ontario's families and our belief in their future prosperity—

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

RAMADAN

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Salaam Alekum. I am proud to rise today to speak about the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.

Muslims in Ontario joined with those worldwide, Speaker, as you know, to engage in the month of the fast, in which people not only abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk but also curb various appetites and strong emotions. It is a time for prayer, for reflection, for giving thanks, for personal sacrifice and acts of charity. This is a special time when Muslims renew their faith with family and community, and commemorate the

various bonds between man, God, family, nature, history and society.

Part of the many celebrations and commemorations in the month of Ramadan is the special tradition of having get-togethers when children, usually in their early teens, try one or two days of fasting. My own daughter Shamsa, aged 10, tried one day of fasting and enjoyed the whole experience immensely.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to purify body, mind and soul.

I also find it incredibly heartening that our schools take time to teach children about this and many other religious celebrations that make up the mosaic of Ontario. This, of course, helps to impart the virtues of harmony, understanding and peaceful coexistence in Ontario's wonderful multicultural society.

The month of Ramadan ends this weekend with the festival of Eid, in which people exchange gifts, overeat and renew ties with family and friends. All of us in Ontario are grateful to be living in, in the Premier's words, "the most blessed province in the best country in the world." Eid Mubarak.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 111(b).

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Balkissoon presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Not at this time. The report is pretty straightforward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 111(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUBLIC SECTOR EXPENSES REVIEW ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'EXAMEN DES DÉPENSES DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Takhar moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 201, An Act to provide for review of expenses in the public sector / Projet de loi 201, Loi prévoyant l'examen des dépenses dans le secteur public.

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. Harinder S. Takhar: I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTRONIC SEXUAL MATERIAL), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À L'ÉDUCATION (DOCUMENTS ÉLECTRONIQUES À CARACTÈRE SEXUEL)

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 202, An Act to protect our children from pornography / Projet de loi 202, Loi visant à protéger nos enfants contre la pornographie.

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. Gerry Martiniuk: The industry estimates that only 35% of our schools and libraries in Ontario filter pornography on their computers. This bill would make it mandatory that the use of filtering pornography systems be installed for all computers in schools and libraries in Ontario.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF PRESIDING OFFICERS

Hon. Brad Duguid: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the presiding officers of the Legislature.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that, notwithstanding the orders of the House dated December 5, 2007, March 26, 2009, and September 14, 2009, Mr. Wilson, member for the electoral district of Simcoe–Grey, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House; Ms. DiNovo, member for the electoral district of Parkdale–High Park, be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House; and Mrs. Munro, member for the electoral district of York–Simcoe, be appointed Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House.

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

Motion agreed to.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

AGENCY SPENDING

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I rise today to inform the House of steps very recently announced by Premier McGuinty to provide further accountability and transparency with regard to the use of taxpayers' dollars.

Every taxpayer dollar counts, particularly in these difficult economic times. It is more important than ever to ensure that we all take responsibility for ensuring that hard-earned tax dollars are spent wisely.

The Public Sector Expenses Review Act, 2009, if passed, would empower the Integrity Commissioner to review the expense claims of senior officials who are employed by or appointed to our largest public agencies, boards and commissions. A common set of expense rules would be established under the act that agencies would be required to follow. This will ensure that agency expenses are in alignment with the rules that apply to others in public service, including cabinet ministers. If the Integrity Commissioner determines that all or part of an expense is not allowable, she may require repayment of the expenses in whole or in part. The Integrity Commissioner may also command other remedial action. Under the proposed act, the Integrity Commissioner will be required to give the Speaker of the assembly a written report each year.

While the vast majority of public servants follow the rules and work hard to protect tax dollars, some do not. That is why we have taken new steps to ensure that each of us understands and follows the rules regarding expenses.

The introduction of this act today follows a number of actions recently announced by this government to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not being misspent. Most recently, the government announced that expenses for the Ontario public service's senior management, cabinet ministers, political staff and senior executives at Ontario's 22 largest agencies will be posted online, starting no later than April 1, 2010. We also announced that we will increase the number of random audits of expenses to ensure that rules are being followed. During annual audits of Ontario's agencies, boards and commissions, external auditors will be required to look at expenses and expense practices to ensure that rules are followed and internal controls are in place.

On September 1, 2009, the Premier announced that 22 of the province's largest agencies, boards and commissions will be required to have the expense claims of senior officials reviewed by the Integrity Commissioner. This requirement is similar to the same rigorous oversight provision that currently applies to cabinet ministers and the political staff. Expenses deemed unacceptable will have to be paid.

Also on September 1, the Premier directed agencies, boards and commissions to strictly adhere to the rules of the Ontario public service's Travel, Meals and Hospitality Expenses Directive. We also announced an external government-wide review of accountability at agencies, boards and commissions to ensure that the interests of taxpayers are protected. These actions are designed to shine a light on expenses so Ontarians will know who exactly is spending what exactly.

The vast majority of public servants and appointees to our agencies, boards and commissions know the rules and follow the rules. The steps that our government has taken will make it easier for everyone to know the rules and harder for anyone to break the rules. We are putting in place more education, more oversight and more transparency to achieve greater accountability. I am confident that the public servants working for Ontarians, both inside the government and in our agencies, boards and commissions, will, because of the steps we have taken, better appreciate our shared responsibility to be respectful of taxpayer dollars. Every person working for taxpayers must take responsibility for knowing the rules and following the rules, just as our government will continue to take responsibility for enforcing the same rules.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make this statement. I look forward to my colleagues on the other side supporting this bill as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses?

Mr. John O'Toole: In fact, I'm shocked and disappointed today—no different than the last time they talked about PricewaterhouseCoopers and that they were going to do an audit. This really comes down to a matter of trust. Ultimately, the people of Ontario, in my view, have lost trust.

The real key here is, Minister, you above all should know that the buck stops with the Premier. You personally have experienced this reversal of decisions in the past, shall I say. Minister, you are being used, in my opinion, and you should be able and man enough to stand up against it. They're asking you to hide the OLG and the eHealth scandal and the other scandals that are still out there to be discovered. In fact, Minister, you are being asked to close the door after the horses have run away.

I ask you if you are speaking today to the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of the Premier. I gather and I assume that you are. It's my suggestion to you, Minister, that this responsibility of integrity and oversight belongs foremost with the minister, in your case, or with Minister Duncan or any of the ministers of the crown. Are you suggesting that the Dalton McGuinty cabinet is incompetent or incapable of oversight of the ministry they're charged to overlook? I am surprised, as I said, and disappointed. Their answer to this is to shift the responsibility and the focus to the Integrity Commissioner's office.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, spoke to the office, and yes, there had been a conversation, and what did Lynn say? She said that it is up in the air just now.

You talked about the Integrity Commissioner in a way that they are somehow going to assume this responsibility with not much interruption. We know that there could be as many as 80,000 employees filing expenses. It could amount to a million or more expense documents to be audited. The Integrity Commissioner's office has eight employees today under their charge. My next assumption is that Premier McGuinty is now creating another bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is to shuffle paper and create reports that are brand new and an additional—almost like another layer of government, arm's length, but are they arm's length? The arm's-length component—when they ruled on the Takhar case a while ago, the Premier overruled that. It's in the press today. The media are quite aware that you're trying to shift the focus from the Premier.

My conclusive remark is this. It was said by a great president of the United States, "The buck stops here."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Harry Truman.

Mr. John O'Toole: Exactly. That president knew when he was responsible for the ultimate decisions of government. So I assume that they've used this minister, kind of a junior ministry that he has, and that ministry is now being asked to shuffle this responsibility of spending taxpayers' money. We've seen, during the summer of the scandal, things that to me are shocking and disappointing. I think it's time for real leadership with a real plan instead of these words and documents, to shift it over to a non-elected, non-accountable, arm's-length agency. I would say the eHealth agency was an arm's-length agency. How did they do? I wonder if your speech actually cost \$25,000 today. I think it was worth about 25 cents, but my point here is, this legislation does not nearly address the issue. What it's trying to do is trying to obfuscate, to shuffle off, to deflect and defer the responsibility of this Premier. He's absent of responsibility for an extremely important consequence of spending taxpayers' money. Imagine wining and dining while the people of Ontario are suffering unemployment and an economy is in shock.

There's a lesson to be learned here: We are all for accountability. You have voted against many of our initiatives about accountability. We want to see the real action of this legislation, and we don't want you to be shuffling off what belongs to the minister to be responsible, whether it's the eHealth scandal, the lottery scandal or the scandals yet to be determined. There's more—

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

1530

Mr. Paul Miller: I can't help but think that once again the McGuinty government is late for the party, but this time the party may have cost hard-working Ontario taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in questionable expense claims at eHealth, Ontario Lottery and Gaming, and who knows where else. It all leaves Ontarians rightly asking whether this government is truly committed to accountability or whether it is all smoke and mirrors.

I say that for a couple of reasons. First, the government has a habit of only releasing information when it is caught. The only way they come clean is when their

hands are in the cookie jar. They're introducing this bill only after they have been caught. What happened to the last six years? Why only now?

Second, but equally troubling, is the allegation we heard yesterday that the Premier's assistant chief of staff was involved in screening and managing freedom of information requests made in government agencies. We heard that allegation on the same day that the Premier boasted of the government's commitment to the FOI process, saying his government has "truly enhanced transparency and accountability in the province of Ontario."

Gangs of political spin doctors shouldn't be reviewing freedom of information requests. They have no business being involved in which information is being released and which is not. They shouldn't be involved at all. It's time for the Premier to come clean on whether he sent his assistant chief of staff to a meeting with the former head of OLG to make sure that the FOI didn't embarrass the government.

We have to question why the Premier would not answer the question asked by NDP leader Andrea Horwath this morning. Why did he fob it off to his Minister of Finance? Was the Premier once again going to be questioned about being economical—a good word—with the truth, so he ducked his responsibility to respond and his accountability to the people of our province?

The Minister of Finance's assertion that "We will respond to that in due course and in an appropriate fashion" is absolutely unacceptable. Question period is "due course," and the "appropriate fashion" is to respond openly and honestly, not the time to weave and bob around the truth.

The people are getting wise to these tactics, to the great show with no substance. They know that the only thing that is transparent is how this government is trying to hide behind smoke and mirrors.

It's time for the Premier to come clean on all the untendered contracts in ministries and all—I repeat all—agencies, boards and commissions under his jurisdiction. That's what NDP leader Andrea Horwath has been calling for.

It's time for the Premier to come clean on his relationship with high-priced, well-connected consultants with ties to the upper levels of the Liberal Party.

Accountability will only come when this Premier comes clean with the truth. The legislation today doesn't do that. It doesn't blow the lid off the scandals that have emerged and will continue to emerge in the coming months.

Ontarians deserve a full and transparent review of what has happened and a plan to ensure that it never—I repeat, never—happens again. Only when this government decides to be forthcoming with all relevant information and documentation will we all know that the legislation is not a mere window dressing of smoke and mirrors.

It is simply doesn't cut it. No matter how hard this minister and his Premier try to say it does, the people of Ontario are very clear: They know that it does not resolve or respond to this government's abuse of their money.

PETITIONS

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to present another 200 names from the people of Sudbury for bringing a PET scanner to Sudbury Regional Hospital, and it goes as such:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ...; and

“Whereas, by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay ...; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine ...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario...”

That brings to 400 the people who support this petition. I fully support it myself and will send it to the table with page Robert right after I sign it.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario has provided \$530,000 to Pretty River Academy, a private school in Collingwood, to build a soccer field for its 156 students; and

“Whereas applications by the town of Collingwood for other, more needed public recreational facilities under the same program were turned down;

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

“That Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government withdraw the grants made to Pretty River Academy under the recreational infrastructure program and redistribute them to facilities that will be in the public domain.”

I’m going to give that to the page to give to the table.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today with this petition:

“Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

“Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

“Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario’s economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax

on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a \$2-billion income tax cut;

“Be it resolved that the undersigned call on the Legislature to cancel the scheduled implementation of sales tax harmonization.”

I affix my signature to this, and Carlos will be bringing it down.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John O’Toole: Earlier, I read a petition on the hospital emergency in Fort Erie on behalf of our leader, and today I read another one on behalf of my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the municipality of Clarington passed resolution C-049-09 in support of Lakeridge Health” hospital in “Bowmanville; and

“Whereas area doctors, hospital staff and citizens have raised concerns that Bowmanville’s hospital could turn into little more than a site to stabilize and transfer patients for treatment outside the municipality; and

“Whereas Clarington is a growing” municipality “of over 80,000; and

“Whereas we support the continuation of the Lakeridge Bowmanville site through access to on-site services, including emergency room, internal medicine and general surgery;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the McGuinty government”—namely, the Minister of Health—“take the necessary actions to fund our hospitals equally and fairly. And furthermore, we request that the clinical services plan of the Central East LHIN address the need for the Bowmanville hospital to continue to offer a complete range of services appropriate for the growing community of Clarington.”

I’m pleased to present this to one of the pages, Kingsong, and sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the 2009 budget provides that the province of Ontario will offset additional total costs to the municipal sector related to the creation of a harmonized sales tax; and

“Whereas Mini Lakes Residents Association is a non-profit Ontario corporation that provides water and waste-water services in accordance with all regulatory requirements to its community of 260 homes, with a primarily senior population in a rural municipality in which there are no municipal water and waste-water services available as an option; and

“Whereas the imposition of an additional 8% sales tax for all of the services that must be purchased by the Mini Lakes Residents Association in order to provide these services to the residents, in accordance with all regulatory requirements, will result in a significant increase in

cost to the residents that would not be the case where municipal services were provided;

1540

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

“That the province of Ontario also extend the offset of additional total costs related to the creation of a harmonized sales tax to designated non-municipal providers of municipal services where those municipal services are not available, including Mini Lakes Residents Association.”

This is signed by 451 residents in the Mini Lakes community in Puslinch township, Wellington county. I support this petition, and I have affixed my signature to it.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province’s underserved area program (UAP) that” will “result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed physicians; and

“Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep physicians are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in communities in rural ridings such as Simcoe–Grey; and

“Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty’s now-forgotten health tax since 2004, expecting health care services to be improved rather than cut; and

“Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the wasteful and abusive spending under the McGuinty Liberals’ watch at eHealth Ontario;

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

“That the McGuinty government immediately stop its ill-advised attack on rural health care and on rural communities who need financial incentives to successfully recruit and retain doctors.”

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present another petition. It sounds unusually similar to that just presented. Mine reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province’s underserved area program (UAP) that may result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed doctors; and

“Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep doctors are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in smaller communities” in Ontario; and

“Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty’s now-forgotten health tax since 2004, expecting health care services to” in fact “be improved rather than cut; and

“Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the wasteful and abusive spending under the” current “McGuinty Liberals’ watch at eHealth” and others;

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

“That the McGuinty government not reduce or eliminate financial incentives rural communities and small towns need to attract and retain doctors.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present this to Alyssa, one of the new pages here.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas several paramedics in Simcoe county had their pensions affected when paramedic services were transferred to the county of Simcoe as their pensions were not transferred with them from HOOPP and OPTrust to OMERS, meaning they will receive significantly reduced pensions because their transfer did not recognize their years of continuous service; and

“Whereas when these paramedics started with their new employer, the county of Simcoe, their past pensionable years were not recognized because of existing pension legislation; and

“Whereas the government’s own Expert Commission on Pensions has recommended that government move swiftly to address this issue; and

“Whereas the government should recognize this issue as a technicality and not penalize hard-working paramedics;

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

“That the Minister of Finance support Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions to OMERS from HOOPP or OPTrust.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s terrific to have this many opportunities today to present petitions on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

It reads as follows:

“Whereas the proposed harmonization of the Ontario retail sales tax (RST) with the federal GST has the potential to increase costs to many small businesses and their customers; and

“Whereas these added costs ... have a devastating impact in difficult economic times, and organizations such as the Ontario Home Builders’ Association” and other associations “have estimated harmonization would add” as much as “\$15,000 in new taxes to the price of a new ... home”—shameful;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, reject the harmonization of GST and RST unless there are exemptions to offset the adverse impacts of harmonization, so ... the outcome will be a reduction in red tape” and taxes.

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to the Legislature today.

TAXATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s plan to ‘harmonize’ the PST and GST will result in Ontario taxpayers paying 8% more for a multitude of products and services; and

“Whereas the 8% tax increase will increase the cost of services such as housing and real estate services, gasoline, hydro bills, home heating fuel, Internet and cable bills, haircuts, gym memberships, legal services, construction and renovations, car repairs, plumbing and electrical services, landscaping services, leisure activities, hotel rooms, veterinary services for the family pet and even funeral services; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers cannot afford this tax grab—particularly in the middle of a recession;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to abandon the sales tax increase announced in the 2009 budget.”

I’ve affixed my signature and give this to page Robert.

TAXATION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Petitions? The member for Simcoe–Grey. I’m starting to lose track here of your order.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The repetition is throwing you off.

I want to thank David Turner from Alliston for sending this petition in. It says:

“Whereas the hard-working residents of Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax ... that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, for house sales over \$400,000, fast food under \$4, electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than \$30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass

cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

“Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. John O’Toole: I have another petition, and this one also addresses the issue of underfunding in health care. These are from people in my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas many Ontarians are concerned that Premier McGuinty’s government’s new local health integration networks,” referred to as LHINs, “will lead to the concentration of health care services in large regional centres; and

“Whereas many local hospitals provide outstanding care in small communities; and

“Whereas Lakeridge Health Port Perry serves as an excellent model for a wide range of hospital care provided close to home; and

“Whereas citizens want to see the continuation of these services in their hospitals, including obstetrics, general surgery and” of course “the ER;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask” politely “that the province of Ontario support community-based hospitals through fair funding”—population-based—“and through policies that recognize the importance of local hospitals.”

I’m pleased to present this petition to Ava, one of the new pages from my riding of Durham, and sign and support this petition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has passed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES ET LA GOUVERNANCE DES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 15, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’éducation en ce qui concerne le rendement des élèves,

la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et d'autres questions.

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

1550

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my absolute pleasure today to be able to rise in the House and speak to Bill 177, the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act. I'm pleased to speak, of course, as the newly appointed parliamentary assistant for education, as a teacher and as a vice-principal. I'm thrilled to be here and to be part of this discussion.

Applause.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thanks, Yasir.

I did want to begin as the teacher that I am, and I would like to inject some clarity into the debate for the people of Ontario. I want to be a teacher and I want to make some corrections. There were some comments made by the member from Trinity–Spadina, the education critic for the third party. He looked at section 3, the statement of purpose in the bill, which reads, "All partners ... have a role to play." The comments were, "I don't know who the partners are." I say, on behalf of all of the staff in our schools, all of the partners, you need to know who the partners are. They put their heart and soul into our students and into student achievement, and I say to the critic of the third party that you need to know.

Comments were also made—"the critic said, 'Close the gap.' I don't know what 'close the gap' means." I'm concerned because I have a document written by the member from Trinity–Spadina and in the document he says, "Closing the gaps in student achievement means orchestrating higher EQAO scores." One day in the House he says, "I don't know," and the next day he has a document that clearly sets out that he thinks he knows. So I'm confused, and I guess as a point of clarification, student achievement is about much more than test scores. Test scores are one indicator, of course, but student achievement is about more than marks. It's about student self-esteem, it's about formative assessment, it's about summative assessment and it's about that whole process of learning, all the complex structures that are in place in our schools to support our students. It's about the whole student, it's about the teacher, it's about our education support staff; it's about all of those people in our schools that, again, put their heart and soul—it's a vocation to support our students to achieve and become contributing members of society.

I wanted to take a moment and talk about OPSBA, who support Bill 177, and again, make note of a correction; we heard something different yesterday. Today I wanted to read, for the record, what OPSBA has to say:

"We appreciate that we have had the opportunity for substantive contribution during the school board governance review process....

"There is deep consensus"—a deep consensus—"among OPSBA's member boards that setting the conditions that will provide a high-quality education for every student to succeed in school and in life is the

absolute first priority of a school board.... The current government has consistently adopted a collaborative approach to working with boards, engaging them in education policy development and providing resources to boost opportunities for, and reduce barriers to, high levels of achievement for all students."

I also wanted to look at the documents that the member of the third party sent out, and he quotes, "As a former school trustee I am incensed that parents' elected representatives are being muzzled." This is far from the way it is. Paula Peroni, the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and member of the governance review committee, says, "The Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees' Association is pleased to see that this new legislation affirms the importance of the role of the publicly elected trustee. It places new emphasis on student achievement and acknowledges the role that all partners play in enhancing student achievement outcomes."

So those are my corrections, as the English teacher.

I wanted to next look at comments that were made by Minister Wynne yesterday in her remarks on Bill 177. I thought that her focus on the tone in our schools, the tone of this bill, and the fact that it provides yet more opportunity for students who would not have succeeded without this government's support is a crucial element and one that I would like to reiterate. I know this first-hand, of course, as a vice-principal in a high school for 10 years. My full focus was to support those students who would not have succeeded otherwise, and I could not have done that without the supports of the McGuinty Liberal government since 2003. In our schools, we see a more supportive tone, we see student success teachers, we see high-skill majors, we see our graduation rates going up, we see our test scores going up. Of course, as a vice-principal, I have to acknowledge that our truancy rates are going down. This bill continues this government's track record of improving education.

We have a track record of consultation. If Bill 177 is passed, the regulations will provide for further consultations.

I wanted to quote from a letter from the Minister of Education, Minister Wynne, written to the president and executive directors of all four trustees' associations, as well as to the chair and executive director of the council of directors of education, and copied to all members at the partnership table. The minister writes: "Specifically, I'm confirming that if Bill 177 passes, we will distribute a draft of the provincial interest regulation to the trustee associations and other members of the partnership table for further consideration and input. In order to ensure that we not only get the bill right, but the regulation as well, we are proceeding with consideration of the bill. The consultation over this past summer has highlighted a number of important points that are being considered carefully by the ministry."

When I was in the school system for 21 years, it was consultation and communication that was key to moving forward, and I'm proud to be part of a government that

puts that communication and that consultation at the forefront of everything we do.

As a vice-principal, I was fascinated with education law, as well as safe schools, so I used to spend a lot of time reading the Education Act. That's kind of strange, isn't it? When you say it out loud, it's a little strange. I spent so much time reading the Education Act to be sure I understood my role and my job. The Education Act requires school boards to do a lot of things like hiring staff and building schools, it gives school boards duties and powers, but of course it doesn't speak to student achievement, which I would marvel at as an administrator. Nowhere in the Education Act does it speak specifically to student achievement or hold boards accountable for student achievement or lack thereof.

We're proposing to amend the Education Act to clearly state that school boards are responsible for promoting student outcomes specified in provincial interest regulations.

I thought maybe we would take a minute to look at the statement of purpose of the bill, which, in three categories, helps to clarify and give an overview or some parameters of what we're talking about in Bill 177.

First of all, the statement of purpose says, "A strong public education system is the foundation of a prosperous, caring and cohesive society." Yes, absolutely.

"The purpose of education is to provide students with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society." Students in the gallery, absolutely. Do you want that for yourselves? Do we want that for you? Yes.

Thirdly, "All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education system. We've looked at a variety of issues in the education system, and now we are focusing on improving student achievement.

1600

I'm going to go into just a brief history, which I think helps us to fast-forward to where we are today.

In 1998, there were changes made to school board governance in Ontario, but what wasn't clarified were the roles of boards and trustees. I've got to tell you, those were chaotic times in education. I was teaching English and science, and when I look back, I think of a quote from George Santayana, who said that if we don't remember the past and we don't learn from the past, we're condemned to repeat it. This is a situation where we have to learn from the past.

In a previous government, in 1998, I was a teacher during job action. It was a time of chaos and a lack of communication in the system. There were thousands of hours of lost instructional time. The tone in the schools was not a positive one, and unfortunately, parents spoke with their feet and private school enrolment increased by 50%. This is a fact, and it's a fact that we must never go back to those times.

The way to avoid that kind of chaos again is to continue to communicate and to continue to consult. We have this opportunity to continue to consult, to continue to restore public confidence that was lost during two previous governments, and we will do that with Bill 177, where we will define the role of the trustee, of the director, of the board governance. Of course, that's how you avert chaos: You communicate.

In October 2008, the McGuinty government assembled the governance review committee. It was a province-wide consultation with trustees, directors, parents and the public. In February 2009, the committee provided its first interim report, and in April the governance review committee gave its final report, which included 25 recommendations. In those recommendations, the committee recommended to clarify the duties and roles of school boards, chairs, trustees and directors of education, to provide tools to support effective governance, such as a code of conduct and audit committees, and to enhance capacity for trustees.

Look, we all need our roles defined. From my experience in a school, from supervision monitor, to teacher, to administrator, to superintendent, to support staff, to the director, we need to know what our roles are, so when we work together in a group, I know where my responsibilities begin and end and I know where yours pick up. That's how we continue to work in this symbiotic relationship.

I wanted to tell you a story, because schools really are about people, and I just want to share with you a quick story about a great person whom I had the opportunity to know. He taught me a lot about school board governance. Of course, this is Bill Gerth, who was the former director of education for the Waterloo Region District School Board. We lost Bill, tragically. But what Bill taught me at a time when this was not addressed was that school board governance is crucial to running a system and improving student achievement.

We're blessed in Waterloo to have a fabulous director. Linda Fabi has taken over for Bill, and Linda, I am proud to say, is not only our director; she is a member of the council of directors of education, and she's president of the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association. I have a quote from Linda that's twofold. It refers to the statement of purpose of the bill as well as to the clarification of roles in the bill. Linda Fabi says, "Directors and supervisory officers across the province see the proposed governance legislation as a positive step forward in defining the purpose of public education and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of directors, trustees and boards.

"Our primary responsibility is to ensure that student learning and achievement are given top priority in Ontario, and my colleagues and I look forward to enhanced collaboration with boards of trustees and the Ministry of Education to make this happen on behalf of all students and their families."

Our government has a great deal of respect for Ontario's trustees and our directors of education. We know

they work hard every day to make publicly funded education work.

We also know that good governance by our trustees and directors of education is necessary to support the higher levels of student achievement. This is understood by all of those who will be expected to uphold this new approach, and I wanted to take a moment, for example, to quote Chris Spence, who is the director of education for Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. Chris Spence says, “Greater clarity of roles for everyone in public education will be very helpful. I look forward to further analyzing the legislation and working with trustees and colleagues to strengthen the governance of public education. Our students will be the beneficiaries.”

I wanted to go through several other issues, but I see that my time is rapidly running out. As a good teacher who wants to stay within the parameters of the lesson plan, I will bring this to a conclusion, but I need to make a couple more significant comments.

What we’re proposing in this bill are the most substantial changes to Ontario’s school board governance in a decade. There have been several major reports that have called for governance review to see if the structures in place that are operating are operating effectively. We have responded to those calls. We have agreed to examine how well Ontario’s education system was being served through the assembly of the governance review committee. The committee found strengths, yes, but it also found areas of improvement.

This legislation is designed to address many of the committee’s recommendations. At the same time, it demonstrates our government’s high level of respect for trustees, boards and directors. We seek to clarify the mandate and duties of school boards so that they can meet the expectations of promoting student achievement and well-being, delivering effective, appropriate programs for students and ensuring that board resources are well managed.

We have worked with our education partners to rebuild positive relationships, which of course is a testament to those newly re-established trusts through the statements of support that we’ve received on this bill.

This government will continue to work with all of our education partners to build a better future for all Ontarians. We want to get it right. We will continue consultations. We will continue to communicate. We firmly believe that by strengthening board governance and clarifying roles of all board members, we will continue to build the best possible publicly funded education system in the world.

I might just go out on a limb here, but I believe that this government, the McGuinty government, is already there. We’ve created an incredible system in Ontario. I have lived the system. I have lived two previous governments. I have seen the job action and I have also lived, since 2003, in the schools. My children have seen the improvements. Our communities have seen the improvements. At the end of the day, I don’t have any hesitation in saying, by gosh, I think we do have the best education system in the world right here in Ontario.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It’s a great pleasure to be here today to be able to speak to Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters.

Obviously, I’m very excited to speak about educational issues now that my daughter has started JK, junior kindergarten, this year at Leslie Park Public School. I’m very excited that she’s doing the daily thing in the morning and going to school, and, by gosh, today we found out all the school buses have been late. When I asked my husband why the school buses were late—this is very interesting. School buses in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board are late because there’s a DMV strike, and all of the new school bus drivers can’t get their papers. So in the city of Ottawa, at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the McGuinty Liberals have imported bus drivers from Toronto. Now, you know what they say in eastern Ontario: “When the city of Toronto needs to come down and fix things for us, we don’t like it too much.” Just following on the heels of my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga’s comments about the best system in the world, you’ve got a lot of room for improvement, and it will start with the school bus driver situation that we have in the city of Ottawa.

I’d be interested to find out how they’re going to fix that problem, and I’m doing this for not only myself but for the other parents who have kids on the board. Even speaking with our daycare provider today—some of the kids go to another school in Nepean; they go to Manordale, and even those buses were a little bit off the schedule today.

I think what we ought to be doing here in this chamber is getting those folks who are trained bus drivers to be driving kids to school. That’s what I think we ought to be doing, and if they would like to improve education, that would be a start.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I enjoyed listening to the comments by the member for Kitchener-Conestoga, Ms. Pendergast. I suppose her mother did, too, and I suspect her mother has been watching for the last 30 minutes. We say hello to Ms. Pendergast’s mother, as we have on previous occasions.

The problem is, as much as I enjoyed her comments, as she closed with a flash of partisan hyperbole—not inappropriate—she and I don’t quite agree. As a matter of fact, we don’t agree at all on a whole lot of things around this legislation. Now, Ms. Pendergast was doing good. She’s a partisan member of the Legislature, and she’s defending this legislation. I respect that.

In 30 minutes’ time, we’re going to hear from the New Democratic member, Paul Miller, from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. Paul, in short order, just two years in this Legislature, has marked out some very strong turf for himself on behalf of the New Democrats. Paul Miller’s

comments are ones that I'm eagerly awaiting in some 30 minutes' time, because I know that Paul Miller is not going to pull any punches. It's not going to be the Marquess of Queensberry rules. There's going to be a vigorous evisceration of this legislation when Mr. Miller takes the floor in 40 minutes' time—30 or so—after the Conservatives make their contribution.

I encourage people to listen to what Mr. Miller has to say. I encourage the Liberal members here to listen carefully to what Mr. Miller has to say, and I'd ask them to reflect on what Rosario Marchese had to say yesterday, the NDP's education critic from Trinity-Spadina—a former teacher and a former trustee for the Toronto board of education. I'm looking forward to the following comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for—

Mr. Mario Sergio: York West.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, somewhere in Toronto, Mr. Speaker.

I'm delighted to spend the next one and half minutes speaking about Bill 177, and I have to compliment and congratulate the member from Kitchener-Conestoga for bringing this forward.

As she said, it has received a considerable, extensive consultation, going back to 2008—not only consultation in various parts of the province, but also written comments until 2009.

In her own words, we want to see more consultation, so when we are through, and even as the member from Welland has said, we hope that we hear from all the members and make this even better, so that when the regulations come forward, it will be completed and, indeed, we can say that we are delivering the best of the best for all our students and all our boards.

We are taking action on our report from 2008, so finally it's here. It is our time to dwell on this particular bill. I think every member of the House must agree that it's very important when we deal with our schools, the educators, the directors, the trustees, and the governance of those particular individuals. In the last while, we have seen considerable debate on the various roles and responsibilities of those very people, who deal with delivering the best for our kids.

I do hope that we will deliver in this House from all sides and continue to debate this particular issue, so that at the end, we will see those declarations embody all those recommendations that will make this piece of legislation something that all the members of the House can be proud of and that will deliver the best for our school kids.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga citing in particular her experience as a teacher and, I believe, as a vice-principal. Experience is a great teacher, and we all have

some. I also listened to the comments of my colleague from Nepean-Carleton on the fact that her daughter has just entered school.

I have my experiences, a little bit longer in the tooth, as am I, because I have two—not children; my children are men, so they were educated many years ago here in the province of Ontario. Somehow or other, without blessing the ground that Minister Wynne walks on, they got through the education system, and they're well educated.

And somehow or other, many, many years ago, well over 50 years ago, I was in an education system for anglophones in the province of Quebec that by today's standards would be looked upon as Neanderthal. As a matter of fact, I'm Jewish, and I went to a Protestant school because that's the way it worked then, and somehow or other I got an education.

Having said that, let me refer to the bill, because the bill talks about changes that would put more power, in my view, in the hands of the ministry.

Very particularly, in section 4, it says:

“Section 11 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection....

“(2) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards.”

That's a heck of a lot of power to vest in a ministry. So my belief is that when we listen to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga talk about her background in education, I believe that her support for the bill is more a function of the fact that she's a member of the Liberal caucus than a function of the fact that she used to be in the educational system of the province of Ontario.

Listen carefully to what's going on here. Watch carefully what's going on here. We're saying that school trustees should reflect the communities and you should elect them, and you get 15% to 25% voter turnout. Now what you're going to do is put even more power in the hands of the ministry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Kitchener-Conestoga, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Oh, lovely, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I wanted to also thank the member from Nepean-Carleton for her comments; the member from Welland for his comments and of course for addressing my mother; the member from York West—thank you; and the member from Thornhill—I thank you too.

There's a theme here from all of the comments, and of course the theme is about children. It's about students. As the other members have said, yes, I'm an educator, and the prime focus, my vocation, my whole purpose in life is to make sure that students get an education to become contributing members of society, and that's exactly what this bill is doing. And we're putting forward further consultations.

Again, I may need to reiterate this for a member or two on the other side of the—well, over there. The bill says—

Interjection: Over there?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Over there—that we are proposing to amend the Education Act to clearly state that the school board is responsible for promoting student outcomes specified in provincial interest regulations; ensuring the effective stewardship of the board's resources; delivering effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils; promoting the well-being of the board's pupils; and encouraging pupils to pursue their educational goals. Anyone who can take issue with that needs to go back to the drawing board and take a good look—

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Or the classroom.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: —or the classroom, yes—needs to go back to the classroom and take a good look at their priorities.

We need absolutely—and again, to address the comments of the member from Nepean–Carleton, I appreciate that you're a parent, and congratulations for having a child in school. But do you know what? We need to believe in our system, in our people, in our schools and in our students, because if we don't have the utmost faith in them, no one will.

1620

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm very pleased to be able to join the debate today on Bill 177. I'm going to divide my remarks between those that I have frankly collected on my own, in my own experience, and in the second part I'm going to look at what others have to say, because I think one of the important roles of an MPP is to collect those individuals in your own riding or the broader community who have experience and are able to comment. That's how I want to divide my time.

My first comments, then—my own—are that whenever we're looking at a piece of legislation that has to do with education, it's my belief that we should begin with the interests of the child. Everything that falls out of that in terms of structure, in terms of administration, in terms of the way in which money is spent—all of that—has to come back to that central focus. As I will explain in a few moments, I think there are some priorities here that seem to overtake the interest of the child.

I was very interested in the very beginning of this bill: "The purpose of education is to provide students with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society." On the surface it certainly seems like a most laudable goal. But as I read it and thought about some of the individuals I had the privilege to teach over the years, there was certainly a great variety of students who come to you. And the importance, I think, was respecting what their abilities were. When I see "develop into highly skilled," it seems to me there's a value judgment that we're implying in our purpose.

When I considered, as I mentioned a moment ago, that the paramount concern of any legislation should be the question of the child, I began to think about those I have

seen who would struggle with the most basic circumstances, and if I were writing this, I would emphasize the question of realizing their potential. So right from the very beginning of this bill, I would argue that the interests of the child, in some parts of this bill, such as the purpose, have actually been reduced. The importance of the child has been reduced to what kind of people we want to turn out of the education system.

When I look at the bill overall, I also think there are, again, some indicators we should be conscious of in this regard. Further on, in section 28, the bill talks about professional activity days and says, "establish policies and guidelines respecting criteria and topics for the professional activity days that are required by regulation and require boards to comply with the policies and guidelines." I think back in my own personal experience to the kind of enthusiasm that volunteers had in planning particular events for professional activity days. I think we were able to judge what was appropriate for our school community and certainly were able to call in people from elsewhere, actually from the Ministry of Education itself and from the academic community. But we certainly weren't under those kinds of restrictions of somebody else determining policies and guidelines. It seems to me that we're leaving out the people who are there, in the classroom, able to make those kinds of decisions and recommendations.

Another, further demonstration of this comes later in the bill where it talks about, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations requiring boards to establish parent involvement committees...." Obviously, the language has changed from when we talked about parent councils, but it also goes on to talk about "providing for the composition, mandate and functions." Again, I think those are things that would be better looked at locally, and being able to provide a connection that matters to the people and the community—that is, the parents and the broader community for the benefit of children.

That leads me to another area of my personal concerns about the bill, and that is the question of local autonomy. I think all of us recognize the fact that we're well past the days of a few neighbours who got together, built a school and provided for the children of their immediate community, but part of that is the tradition of elected officials. I think this bill, described by trustees, that I will get to later, as "punitive," would seem to suggest to me that there is a fundamental lack of respect for the autonomy of those elected officials. We talk as elected officials about accountability, and we know we must go to our electorate at election time, and that we are judged by what we have done by those very people who have put us into office. That's the same thing that we have in this process. So I'm not sure, when I look at some of the parts of this bill and certainly the comments made by trustees, that there is the same kind of respect for an elected official that I think the government should demonstrate.

For instance, later in the bill there is a section on duties of board members, and clause (e), in section 218.1, says, "Refrain from interfering in the day to day man-

agement of the board by its officers and staff.” I find it amazing that this would be viewed as necessary in a piece of legislation such as this contemplates because of the fact that, very clearly, for generations there has been an understanding of the role of the elected official vis-à-vis the administration. So I’m quite surprised that it is actually there. At the same time, it says “Consult with parents, students and supporters of the board,” in this case on its multi-year plans. So it immediately raises in my mind somewhat of a conflict, that they are charged, according to this legislation, with the act of consulting, but not in terms of getting involved in day to day. Well, there is an actual connection. When you consult with somebody, people expect that you’re then going to take the information from that consultation and put it into some kind of action plan, or certainly take it further than simply having a meeting to discuss things about which you are then unable to act. So I think there’s an element in this bill that neglects the tradition of local autonomy, neglects the role and the accountability that are inherent in being an elected official.

1630

I also want to just speak briefly, in overall general terms, about this bill, because when you look at certain things such as the ones I’ve just mentioned—and we could go further: “A member of a board shall ... attend and participate in meetings of the board, including meetings of board committees of which he or she is a member”; the consultation with parents; and where it says, “Bring concerns of parents, students, and supporters of the board to the attention of the board...” All of these kinds of things, then, the questions of definitions, the questions of the cost and the time of the administration of this bill, are, I think, things that people should be aware of in what is proposed here in this bill, because I see unfolding in this bill a significant length of time to lead into the development of policies that are contemplated by this piece of legislation.

I’m going to turn now to some of the comments that others have made that I think are important to include. Certainly, one of them would be the commonly held belief that this legislation comes as a result of the Toronto experience with the Catholic school board and the fact that in the last few months, the early part of last year, there were many articles and much attention given to the excesses in spending. As a consequence, Mr. Norbert Hartmann was asked to investigate. It again seems to be that it’s in response to a particular event. Mr. Hartmann did provide the government with some recommendations. He concluded that the “cost of governance at the Toronto Catholic District School Board is among the highest in the province,” and that costs had grown substantially since 2003, which, of course, happens to coincide with the election of the current government. But in here was the genesis, if you like, for the information for the bill that we are looking at at this point. Mr. Hartmann’s report specifically stated:

“The pattern of expenses that trustees claim and the board services available indicate that trustees:

“—provide themselves benefits and services that are not permitted by the Education Act;

“—incur expenses unrelated to their responsibilities as board members; and

“—exercise powers to allocate funds that are not provided in legislation.”

These appear to indicate to me that it is more a question of actually dealing with the legislation that existed as opposed to finding more legislation, as we’re looking at in today’s bill. He made 20 recommendations, and it would seem to me that the spirit of those have to do more with the specific than the general. I think that this is something that is recognized by some of those who have indicated to me their concerns about this bill; that is, trustees. I think it’s important to recognize, as with anything, you cannot in this case paint all trustees throughout the province with the same brush.

I think that the concern expressed to both me as a member of the opposition and our critic is that there are trustees who view this then as something quite threatening. One said, “If this bill passes, I’m afraid my job as a trustee becomes meaningless.” Another said, “It’s dangerous. It says this is going to be a fundamental, substantial shift in the relationship between the ministry and school boards in the province.” So clearly there is concern. Others have said, “This is clearly going to make us servants of the province.” That’s what happened to hospital trustees in the province of Ontario.

The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association has also made some comments. In their discussion paper, they have referred to this piece of proposed legislation as “punitive” and some of the language as “particularly offensive.”

So the government, in the quotes that I provided from the bill, has also provided more regulations and the setting of standards and enforcement, and I think it’s a very important departure. They’re going to have to be responsible for student achievement, but they don’t know what the guidelines are or how any of that is going to be measured. The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association has also indicated that the ministry, of course, did the consultation during the summer, when, firstly, the schools are closed and there are no school board meetings scheduled, so that board members had very little opportunity to look at the content of the consultation and very little opportunity—to the responsibilities.

The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association points out that “the consultation paper addresses in detail what would be required of school boards and has little to say about the corresponding responsibilities of the Ministry of Education or the government.”

A local trustee who spoke to me about this said the following: “My main concern is that these regulations be worded to ensure that there will be supportive measures put in place when need arises rather than punitive ones.” She uses the example in her own school district, which is the York Region District School Board, of how they, as a board, have looked after the low-performing schools and the way in which they have been able to look at those

very specifically geographically and have been able to respond to local needs.

She continues, "My other concern is around the micromanaging, one-size-fits-all approach. As a board, we have been able to do some great things for students with some creative thinking. Any regulations that could be used to stifle that flexibility/creativity would not be in the best interests of our students. This is an area where I think our board could make a very good case."

I think that goes back to a point I made at the very beginning, the importance of recognizing the local voice, the local autonomy, and the importance of putting the child at the centre of the discussion.

A former trustee who contacted me referred to concern about the boards taking more actions against trustees out of fear of what more the ministry might do, effectively silencing minority voices. The bill would allow a board majority to keep an elected trustee out of consecutive board meetings or cut further honoraria.

The biggest threat, of course, in her mind from the ministry is total board takeover. Thus, my main concern is that with these additional bullying-type threats, the minority voice will not be heard at school board tables and local democracy will be further eroded. Furthermore, the consultations held this summer definitely speak to the EQAO as a significant benchmark, but we're not looking at the way in which the boards would respond to that. It simply says that they have that responsibility.

I think there is much that this government could do to respond to some of the concerns that have been voiced by those trustees who certainly have very deep concerns. I think that the questions, then, of local autonomy, respect for the elected trustee and the additional burden of the implementation of this bill as it's contemplated would certainly create a great deal of time and effort and consultation, and without clear outcomes. We still are going to be looking at the importance of the child in any legislation.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments. The member for Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a real opportunity for me to speak about this. I have a real close relationship with the education system. I have a daughter who's a teacher. I have a good part of my nine grandkids going to school. And I try to spend a lot of time at schools when I'm not here, because the saying is—and the saying is true—that kids are our future.

So whenever we can take the opportunity to enhance education, and part of the enhancement of education is about making sure that the money we spend in education—and that the people we empower, whether it's trustees, principals, school board directors, school boards, use that money wisely. So to the criticism from some of the members in opposition—"It's not all there and we don't see this"—the fact is that we're embarking on a process. There was an enormous amount of consultation, and part of the process of debating it here, and

going to committee, is to make those refinements that we hope will make it even better.

I think we need to applaud the minister for taking some time because we want to hear from all those stakeholders and empower some of the trustees, some of the principals, some of the folks in education system to be part of that process. It wasn't top-down-driven; it was bottom-up-driven.

We're here with this legislation today, and the debate is good. I think we can all agree that that's what we're here for. So I would encourage the members from the opposition, there are things to be improved, and I think we're going to get there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened attentively to the member from York-Simcoe because she brings a lot to the table and to the debate with respect to her personal background, and her comments started out most appropriately talking about the purpose of education.

Like many here—I have five children, all of whom I'm proud of. All have at least one degree; maybe in many cases there's two degrees. In fact, one is a high school teacher in England. I think a public education serves a very useful purpose for people to achieve their highest and best potential. So in that theme, in that sentiment, I think we're supportive. But when I look at bills, often they are—how would you say?—infused with some meanness. And I think the meanness here is—it's not me saying this, to keep it on a positive note here. This is an article from the Sarnia Observer.

It says, "Trustees Miffed by Bill." It goes on to say, "Local school trustees are bristling over proposed legislation that would allow the Ontario government to assume" complete "control of boards whose students struggle academically." We have seen that happen here in Toronto when they're spending money on trips and various things like that. There needs to be accountability, but at the same time, if I look at it, it gives full, complete, absolute overarching control to the Minister of Education. This bill is not a slick relationship. In fact, if you looked at several of the reports—the Rozanski report is just one of them—there have been several reports that have been done—the Attorney General. As well, Assistant Deputy Minister Norbert Hartmann's report is very instructive in terms of how they have a problem with education and them not complying. There are portions of this bill that direct the directors of education what to do or else.

I'd like to think that it's a very important bill, but you've—

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: I listened attentively to Ms. Munro, the member for York-Simcoe, as well. Yes, she brings a great deal to this debate because of her experience in the educational system.

Isn't it naive for us to somehow try to pretend that the system is working at its full potential? Of course it's not.

The problem is that this bill won't achieve that end. You can state these goals; you can have a mission statement; you can put signs up with those little clichés—you know, the Reader's Digest sort of things that you read. But all of that language—all of it—isn't going to improve the educational system.

Controlling board trustees and creating a system where they can be silenced, where they can be sent to Coventry, doesn't improve education, and it certainly doesn't enhance the role of trustee, a publicly elected position. So I commend Ms. Munro for her valuable contribution to this debate.

I now look forward, because in about five minutes' time, Paul Miller, the fire-breathing New Democrat from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, is going to be addressing Bill 177. As I said earlier, he doesn't pull any punches. He delivers them straight to the solar plexus. We're going to see and listen to an exciting, passionate, certainly energetic, incredibly enthusiastic and effective critique of Bill 177. Folks, please stay tuned for another four or five minutes; we'll have Paul Miller for you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than delighted to be able to stand up to speak to this bill. After all, I too was a school trustee for over 15 years.

Hon. John Gerretsen: And a good one too.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much.

I think what is really important to recognize is that if you look at the Education Act—it's a very, very thick book—it in fact does not define the role of school trustee other than its financial obligation. It's filled with regulations around how the schools operate. So the idea of providing governance and direction is long overdue in this system and in fact goes back many years. The member from York–Simcoe will remember that the previous government took over supervision of the Toronto District School Board because it felt it lacked governance. I find it fascinating now that governance is not an issue they intend to put any credibility toward.

The whole idea around having a school system is to ensure student achievement and to do that in a way that provides the competency, the requirement around financial credibility for the school trustees, and to ensure that the system operates in an efficient and effective manner. That's part of what this bill will do. It's designed to do that, it will do that and it's a great step forward, working with the people who themselves have been involved in the system for many years.

The public consultation was extensive. The comments were taken from a variety of different sources and incorporated into the thinking. There is always more time for consultation as we move forward, and it's an opportunity to refocus the education system back on the needs of the child, the student. That's what an education system is all about. In fact, without the student there is no education system. You need the student and you need competency with which to run it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for York–Simcoe, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to thank the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Durham and Welland and the Minister of Natural Resources for their comments. Actually, as I listened to each of them, I thought that all of them had something most important to add that echoed some of the comments I had made as well.

The questions of consultation and accountability are ones that I think we all agree on. I certainly agree with the member from Welland that there's always room to improve. I would certainly agree in principle on the question of governance that the minister raised. I think it's important, though, to demonstrate to the House that obviously there are still concerns that are out there. The process of second reading is to be able to demonstrate that there are those concerns that the government needs to address.

1650

With that, I would just close by also saying that we've now heard the second trailer for the upcoming speech of the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to first of all congratulate the member from Kitchener–Conestoga on her new appointment—and secondly, to my colleague Mr. Kormos for those kind words. I hope the show is as good as the preview.

Getting to Bill 177: Many of the guidelines contained in this bill will provide direction for some boards. The government wants to appear to be responding to the spending irregularities which occurred at the Toronto Catholic District School Board. However, the vast majority of school boards have a history of responsible behaviour, and much of what is in this bill is already happening.

The government is using events at the Toronto school board as an excuse to increase its own power at the expense of boards and parents. What the government is really responding to is the refusal of the Toronto Catholic school board to cut programs for children in order to balance the budget, a refusal which demonstrated the inadequacy of the education funding model and resulted in the board being taken over by a government supervisor, in the same way that the Dufferin–Peel Catholic school board was taken over.

The concern is the degree to which the ministry will be calling all the shots for school boards and parents if Bill 177 becomes law. Will there be any room for dissent from elected trustees, and will they be able to effectively represent their constituency and the parents of the children in their system?

The government wants to appear strong and in charge, but this legislation will result in school boards having very little real decision-making power. School board trustees make important and sometimes difficult decisions on behalf of the parents and supporters who elect them. Trustees have always been an essential part of the education of our children. There has always been a balance between the authority of the Ministry of Edu-

cation and the responsibilities of trustees. Bill 177 is a threat to that balance and to the rights of parents. Bill 177 will allow the provincial government to make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards. What will be left for trustees to do on behalf of the parents who elected them?

Concerned parents all over the province have had views on the adequacy of resources, transportation, school closures, lack of special education programming, school fundraising, corporate donations, the curriculum, credit integrity, declining enrolment, school information finder websites etc. They expect their elected trustees to respond to those concerns and take them to the ministry. This legislation abolishes this historical relationship by defining trustees as agents of the government. If enacted, it will make it impossible for trustees to effectively represent parents.

A clear example of the government's lack of respect for trustees is that Bill 177 demands that each school board effectively use the resources entrusted to it. This implies that trustees have not been using resources wisely and that the resources they have been receiving have been adequate. In fact, for years trustees have been struggling to stretch inadequate education funding to meet the needs of their students, and this is the thanks they get.

What this bill is really saying to boards is, "Use the funding we give you, and don't you dare point out that it is not enough to meet the needs of your students."

This bill claims to mandate student success, but for this government, closing gaps in student achievement means orchestrating and fabricating higher EQAO scores at the expense of all other learning opportunities. What about the growing list of parents who feel that success should be defined by more than test scores? What about parents who don't want to follow the model of the American education system?

The McGuinty government has been reducing the role of school boards. It has been apparent for some time that the government's primary role for trustees has been for them to take the blame for things like school closures, lack of special education services and poor transportation funding. If there was ever any doubt about this, Bill 177 removes it.

The parents' elected representatives are being muzzled. How does this bill help parents? If trustees lose their power, parents lose their voice. Bill 177 is sending a clear message to school boards: Do what you're told or else.

Excerpts from Bill 177 and comments:

Bill 177 calls for every school board to:

"(a) promote student outcomes specified in regulations made under section 11.1;

"(b) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources;

"(c) deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils."

Will there also be an amendment to the Education Act to mandate that the Ministry of Education provide the

resources required to promote student achievement and well-being and deliver effective and appropriate education programs for students?

Bill 177 says that boards must "encourage pupils to pursue their educational goals" and "develop multi-year plans aimed at achieving the goals referred to in clauses (a) to (c)."

Will the ministry commit to providing full, predictable and transparent long-term funding instead of the "rob Peter to pay Paul" that we have now?

Bill 177 requires that trustees "monitor the performance of the board's director of education, or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education, in meeting his or her obligations under the plans referred to in clause (e)" and "annually review the plans referred to in clause (e) with the board's director of education or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education."

Will the ministry finally agree to fulfill your election promise and itself report annually by setting up a long-overdue standing committee on education financing so that we might finally have some transparency in school funding?

Trustees are required under Bill 177 to "consult with parents, students and supporters of the board on the board's multi-year plans under clause 169.1(1)(e)" and "bring concerns of parents, students and supporters of the board to the attention of the board."

Will the ministry agree to respond to the interests of the local community, particularly when threatened school closures require an accommodations and review process which many parents claim ignores their wishes?

Bill 177 will require that "Every district school board shall establish an audit committee."

Once again, when will the ministry subject itself to a standing committee to assess whether the funding model is providing adequate resources to allow trustees to do what is being asked of them? We would like to see the Ministry of Education subject to the same oversight that is being recommended for school boards and trustees. Practise what you preach.

The role of trustees: If Bill 177 passes, the government's wishes will be supreme, but trustees are also elected representatives. What if the people who elected them don't share the government's view about what is best for their children? Concerned parents all over this province have views on the adequacy of resources, transportation, school closures, lack of special education programming, school fundraising, corporate donations, the curriculum, credit integrity, declining enrolment, school information finder websites etc. They expect their elected trustees to respond to those concerns and to take them to the ministry.

This legislation is redefining the role of trustees as agents of the government. The government is clearly taking control of the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of school boards. This bill will be the base of that control, which would be exercised by regulation, and the message to boards is clear: Do what you're told, or else.

The following is a list of the most serious challenges facing public education, followed by reasons why Bill 177 will not solve and will actually hinder efforts to find solutions.

Parent accountability: The bill requires boards to establish parent involvement committees but retains control over the regulations which will determine the composition, mandate and functions of those committees—not much room for the parents, Mr. Speaker.

Trustees are required to bring the concerns of parents, students and supporters to the board's attention. What's missing is a responsibility to bring those concerns to the Ministry of Education, particularly when those concerns conflict with political expediency for the ministry and the government at the time.

1700

Funding: Since its inception during the Mike Harris years, every independent analysis has come to the conclusion that Ontario's education funding model is inadequate to meet the needs of Ontario students. School boards are being asked to do, and the McGuinty government is taking credit for, things that school boards are not given the resources to do properly. We once again have a rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul approach to education in Ontario that forces school boards to run some programs at the expense of others, while the government claims to be doing both. It's not happening.

Parents have challenged this veneer that the government has carefully constructed, and in many cases they have been supported by the school boards and trustees they elected in holding the provincial government accountable. The legislation and the regulations that will ensue will effectively muzzle school boards and elected trustees. If parents can't count on their own elected trustees to represent them when questioning or challenging government education policies and practices, whom can they count on? Is this a dictatorship that they're setting up here?

Special education: According to People for Education, there are approximately 36,000 elementary students and 4,800 secondary students waiting for special education support province-wide. In one third of elementary schools, not all identified students are receiving the support that was recommended for them. The current delivery system has deliberately and dramatically reduced accountability. Parents have no way to guarantee that the ministry is providing adequate funding and no way to ensure that the school board is allocating the funding to special education programs. The only accountability in the system falls on the shoulders of the regular classroom teacher, who is supposed to meet the needs of the special education child and make all the program modifications with little or no support. Increasingly, parents are questioning the government's approach to special education. They should be able to count on their elected trustees to demand answers from the government. This bill will make it very difficult for trustees to do that.

Fundraising and privatization: Ontario parents are raising a reported \$600 million to support their schools,

and the real amount is probably much higher. We are concerned about equity in our public education system and the strings that come with private funds; strings that are attached to our children. When some schools can raise hundreds of thousands of dollars more than others and some schools can cut deals with Future Shop while others cannot, our public education system is definitely threatened. All schools must be fully and properly funded so that we don't have to sell our children to the highest bidder. The government encourages the privatization of our schools and the selling of our students because it takes the pressure off the government and makes up for inadequate funding, but only in selected locations. If you oppose the slide toward two-tier education or if your children aren't in a school that can raise or attract tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, too bad, so sad, and if this bill passes, there won't be much your trustee can do to help you.

School information finder website: Just as the government view of performance seems to be limited to test scores, their view of what they think parents should know about schools is limited to simplistic statistical labels, if the school information finder website is any indication. Why would the government provide information that would facilitate the ranking of schools based on the number of lower-income households or the university education of their parents—unbelievable—the number of special education students, the number of children whose first language is not English or the number of recent immigrants? Why would parents want to know that kind of information? I don't know. Explain it.

If the government really wanted to provide information that would be useful to parents, they could include information like all the class sizes, including grades 4 to 8; the number of full-time staff; the number of special education teachers; the number of ESL teachers; does the school have a full-time teacher-librarian; does the school have a qualified physical education instructor; does the school have music, art or dance programs; does the school have a computer lab? I don't see that on the website. Is there a daycare on the site? Very important. Does it provide half-day or after-school programs? I don't see that on the website. Does the school have a transportation arrangement with the local daycares? Is there a lunch program at the school? What are the school bus schedules? Will my school have a full-day kindergarten program? Is there a list of opportunities for working parents to access the school outside of the school day?

Every major stakeholder group in this province, including the government's own partnership table, is opposed to this detestable site, but it's still up and running.

Parents need trustees who are unfettered to bring this issue to the ministry, not trustees who are going to be redefined by Bill 177 as servants of the ministry.

Declining enrolment: Closing schools offers a tempting, unimaginative, short-term approach to declining enrolment which will provide immediate limited cost

savings and nothing more. The spaces in our schools could be used for community centres, parenting programs, child care, senior services, adult ESL courses, public libraries and even public health centres. The spaces in our schools should not be viewed as a Ministry of Education problem, but as an opportunity for other ministries to provide much-needed services to our communities.

Similarly, the government cannot shift the responsibility for making this happen on to the school boards. The government's recent working group on declining enrolment encouraged school boards to "solicit expressions of interest"—solicit expressions of interest? Wow. That's not too great, I don't think—"from prospective community partners." Doesn't the ministry know who the partners are in the community? They've got to solicit them? They should know that already. These communities have been around for hundreds of years. That's not good enough, what they're doing.

The government should be actively coordinating the utilization of available space by a number of ministries to create the community hubs that are required. The result would be that communities could get valuable services, and fewer schools would actually have to close. We could utilize those good buildings. Communities around the province do not want to see the closing of their schools as the only response to declining enrolment. Without strong representation from local trustees, schools will close because it will provide some short-term revenue and, again, take the pressure off inadequate funding formulas.

This bill would create a real dilemma for trustees. Do they represent the supporters who elected them, or are the masters of the Ministry of Education controlling them?

Student achievement: Directors of education will be required by this bill to ensure that "All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education system."

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Do we have a quorum?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Stoney Creek, take your seat. The member for Welland has a point of order.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Do we have a quorum, Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have much time left, but I'll just skim over some of the things that are here. Student achievement is another

category which I won't be able to get to today. General comments I can get to.

We believe that trustees need direction regarding spending and expenses, and we believe that they will welcome it. We congratulate the Auditor General for an excellent report, and school boards have already developed policies to increase accountability.

We are concerned that neither the report of the governance review committee nor Bill 177 fully acknowledges the duties of trustees as elected representatives. The report makes them sound like ministry employees. What about their duties to parents who elected them? Do trustees have the right to represent the communities in which they are elected in the face of inadequate government funding?

Boards in Toronto and Dufferin-Peel have been taken over because they refused to cut programs to their students. Bless them.

Trustees need and welcome guidance in fiscal matters, but they are not part of a master-servant relationship. Any legislation must leave boards free to ask questions for the voters who elected them—many of the same voters who elected us here.

How many children will be denied special education services due to staff cuts? How many new Canadians will never get the support they require due to the lack of ESL classes?

1710

How many children will continue to sit in unrepaired, unhealthy and unsafe classrooms because of deferred maintenance? How many parents will have to deal with an answering machine, when they call their children's school, due to cuts in support staff?

Whatever fiscal standards this bill sets for trustees, we hope that the Ministry of Education will adopt the same standards of accountability and transparency for itself.

If the current scope for local decision-making is inadequate, why introduce a bill that will limit it even further?

I could go on for another hour, but I really believe I touched on some important points here and I hope they didn't fall on deaf ears. I hope we can all work together to make our school system a very good place to be, because I think Ontario has the ability to give our students the best education in the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm looking forward to entering into the debate. I'd say to my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek: You know, there are many people who support this bill, not just on this side of House but people in the community who know something about education.

I want to quote Dave Cooke, who was the former NDP Ontario Minister of Education and former co-chair of the Education Improvement Commission: "I am pleased to see that this legislation clarifies the role of school boards in terms of holding directors of education accountable for strategic plans."

What does Annie Kidder, executive director for People for Education, say? “It’s great to see the province move quickly on the recommendations from the report on school board governance. This legislation will allow the province and school boards to proceed with plans to clarify the roles of directors, school board chairs and trustees. These improvements will help school boards be more effective and it will improve public confidence in education.”

What does Paula Peroni, president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, and who was a member of the governance review committee, say? She says that her association “is pleased to see that this new legislation affirms the importance of the role of publicly elected trustees. It places new emphasis on student achievement and acknowledges the role that all partners play in enhancing student achievement outcomes.”

Chris Spence is the director of education—where? Oh, in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. What does he say? “Greater clarity of roles for everyone in public education will be very helpful”—

Mr. Paul Miller: —Toronto.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Well, Hamilton always provides great solutions to Toronto. I’m sure you’d agree with me.

“I look forward to further analyzing the legislation and working with trustees and colleagues to strengthen the governance of public education. Our students will be the beneficiaries.”

Bill 177 is all about focusing everyone toward student achievement. Surely we can all agree, and the member doesn’t have to contort himself into a pretzel to get behind this bill. This is what we’re debating today, and I’m sure, on reflection, they will vote for this. I’d be shocked if they didn’t.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: Again, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek spent considerable time—and I feel his research was commendable—outlining some of the apparent weaknesses of the legislation.

But he did offer the dilemma that we’re offered here: I don’t think there’s anyone who is opposed to public education. In fact, they mentioned the great work done by Dave Cooke when he was implementing the Royal Commission on Learning. He implemented, I should say, the curriculum. Dave Cooke, when they were the government, implemented the curriculum. He invented the college. He said, in the Royal Commission on Learning, that the structure of the College of Teachers should be a majority of non-teaching. He was a brave and courageous leader in education.

But I looked further back and, God rest his soul, John Sweeney, who was an educator himself, from London and a Liberal member, did the Sweeney commission. The Sweeney commission was well lauded. In fact, he cut the number of school boards in half. So there has been a lot of work done by all parties to make education more affordable, more accessible and more accountable.

All the money in those glamorous, glittery offices should be stripped away and it should go to the students. When we have children with learning problems—the money there. When I saw the Toronto school board spending money on trips and conventions and stuff like that, and there were children who weren’t getting special education—these are reasons the government should be moving forward with this bill, and they are, swiftly and sternly. They’re actually—I quoted an article earlier—stripping away most of the function of the school board, basically, to the extent that if you read the bill and the purpose clause, you’re going to see that “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards.”

Minister Wynne has taken complete control of education. It’s shameful. The relationship of teaching —

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

Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: It’s just this person’s opinion, but I think Paul Miller, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, hit the ball out of the park. He did a stunningly effective job of displaying the shortcomings of this legislation and focusing on what the real issues are, and that is adequate resourcing of our public education system here in the province of Ontario.

I don’t know about you, Speaker, but I go back home, down to Welland and Wainfleet and Port Colborne and Thorold and South St. Catharines. From time to time, I venture into Jim Bradley’s riding in the larger part of St. Catharines. I’ve got parents coming to me all the time, and a whole lot of teachers—elementary school teachers, high school teachers—concerned, really concerned, about the failure of this government to rebuild education here in Ontario: concerns about specialized teaching resources and assistance for those teachers; concerns about the kids who need some special supports in the classroom—a real problem, a real problem.

Because we have integrated schools now, as we should—they’ve been proven a great success. It’s amazing to go to school and see a kid with some special needs and how other kids will support that kid and bond with him or her and develop friendships. It’s an incredibly healthy thing to see. But these same schools and their school boards don’t have the funding to allow them, to permit them to hire adequate numbers of support staff to help teachers who are working with kids with some special needs. The very fundamental issue of things like music teachers and librarians is a crisis across the province. I’m sure it can’t just be Niagara. And these school boards have become as frugal as any, but for a couple of exceptions, and I’m going to have great fun talking about those exceptions. But these school boards have tended to be as frugal as possibly can be. I appreciate Mr. Miller’s comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than pleased to be able to respond to some of the comments that were made.

If you go back and do a little history, there is a very large Pepsi logo on a school floor in an NDP-dominated riding—interesting.

Having said that, the College of Teachers, teacher evaluations and the reduction of school boards, instituted by the NDP government, actually permitted a teacher to come and chain himself to a tree in Dave Cooke's office. And then of course it was all instituted by the Harris government, which then in turn ended up with the largest labour disruption in this province. So I really don't think that either of these two gentlemen have the history to be able to go back and say anything substantive about school board governance and trustees and the issues around them.

It's fascinating when you look—we're looking at improving student evaluation and student achievement. Again, it's all about students. It's about how do we provide the best education for students. And every time you go towards a governance structure that actually again puts students at the centre of what we're doing, you're going to have a better system. Interestingly enough, trustees themselves have been asking for this for years. They want and they do know and understand the needs of the children, and the dollars that are required to be able to move forward to provide for those children.

Interjection.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: So, in fact, you need a history lesson. It's a little bit on the sad side that you don't take a good look at what happened. You cut funding.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's pathetic.

Speaker of the House: Member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: There's never been more funding put into this education system than there has been in the last five years.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I remember the social contract.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I remember the social contract. I remember the money that the unions spent on arbitration issues. Those dollars now go into the classroom and not into arbitration. It is unnecessary.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to thank the member from Durham for his kind words. Once again, my friends on the opposite side of the House have a difference of opinion, and of course they even got in some comments about pretzels and Pepsi; I don't know what that was all about.

But anyway, it was typical of their response, because when the government's under attack and we bring good points forward, they scramble and they come up with excuses. The member even said that I probably don't have any experience because she is so much older than

me and she's been around longer. That's really pathetic. That's really pathetic.

1720

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I actually think that the member from Hamilton is being quite sexist. The fact that he refers to my age is irrelevant in this House, and I would like an apology.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I don't know that it's a point of order, but I will give everyone the opportunity to say what they wish.

Mr. Paul Miller: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if the member was offended, I apologize. However, I'd like to bring to her attention that there are other people of her age in this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm going to give the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek some advice: I wouldn't go there. You have 43 seconds left.

Mr. Paul Miller: Anyway—I won't go there. But you know what? It's really bad when you've got to dig up that kind of stuff.

I really find it amusing. When you get good points and you try to bring them forward, and people get off the topic and try to attack people personally, it's pretty bad. I'm sorry these things happen, Speaker, but you know what? In all fairness, what we all want in this House, I'm sure, is a good education for our kids and our grandkids. That's what we want. Regardless of the little comments and the little feedback here and there, overall I think most people in this House want what's best—

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

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 177.

Just to give you a little bit of background into this, we know that a strong, publicly funded education system is the foundation of a prosperous, caring and cohesive society. The purpose of education is to provide students with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society.

All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being and in closing the gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education system. I don't think there's anything more important to our society than having that confidence in our publicly funded education system.

Many people have asked, why Bill 177 and why now? In 1998, the previous government introduced legislation that fundamentally changed the publicly funded education system in Ontario. That bill, however, did not address the necessary changes to governance structures within school boards. Since there's no appetite to go back to the way boards operated before amalgamation, we need to address school board governance now. There have been repeated requests for the government to address this, and we need to act.

Now, I ran as a trustee in 1997. I ran in the area of the board that is now the Trillium Lakelands District School

Board in the city of Kawartha Lakes. I spent 12 years on that school board. When I became a member of that board, I was a raw rookie walking into it. I didn't know what to expect. I had the incredible luck to be able to serve with some incredible trustees in that first round, trustees who had had vast experience in the old way that boards operated, when they had the right to tax. Many said that they could make local decisions, and that impacted boards a lot.

I had three trustees in particular from that former board who were great mentors for me: Cheryl Murdoch, who represented Haliburton; Doris Monahan, who represented the Muskoka region; and Judy Saunders from the city of Kawartha Lakes. They were just a few of the trustees I served with over the years, but they had a great focus on school board governance.

The board basically said at that point in time that with the change in government funding at that point, where they no longer had the ability to tax, what we needed to do was take the money we were given by the province and make the best use of it we could. Later in my career on the school board, I got to know a trustee from York region who was chair of the York region school board for I guess about 17 years, Mr. Bill Crothers, and he repeated that line to me. He said that our primary responsibility as school board trustees is to take the money that we are given by the province and make the most efficient use that we can out of that money to generate the highest level of student achievement. I absolutely believe that that is the role of trustees. We need to make sure that those dollars are spent wisely and that they are used in the most efficient way.

Furthermore, in 2003, when our government was given the privilege of serving Ontarians, we committed to restoring a positive working relationship with our educators and making student achievement a priority. In contrast to the unilateral approach by the previous government, our approach has been, and always will be, one of respect, collaboration and consultation with our education partners. Bill 78 was an important step in that approach. That bill brought positive changes in support of publicly funded education. It replaced teacher testing with increased supports for our new teachers, increased the trustee honorarium and empowered student trustees. That approach has resulted in smaller class sizes, thousands of repairs being made to our schools, and eight years of labour peace in the education sector.

My two children went through high school, and they were the first group to graduate without having to go through any type of labour disruption in the secondary system. They had full programs of extracurricular activity. The change in the system, when that came through, was fabulous for parents and students.

On our student achievement front, we have seen a 13% increase in the number of students who are meeting the provincial standards. That standard is a B. It's not just a pass; it's a B. We are saying that simply passing isn't a good enough goal. And Ontario's graduation rate has risen by 11%.

These achievements would not have been possible without the amazing work being done by educators across the province, and trustees. I really believe that the most important responsibility of trustees is ensuring student success. Our government recognizes and supports the invaluable role they play in our publicly funded education system.

One more comment on Bill 78: One of the things that Bill 78 granted to school board associations was the right to be consulted. They have to be consulted on any bill or motion coming forward which has a significant impact on legislation. This is something that I fought for when I was president of the school boards' association. I can remember the conversation that went on at the time with the minister of the day, Minister Papatello. She said, "Why do you need this right to consult? We talk on regular occasions; you even have my cellphone number." I said, "You might not be here forever, and another government down the road might not want to pay the same amount of respect for school boards" that she and the government had. So that was a crucial piece that was instilled in Bill 78. It was crucial for school boards, and I'm very proud to have been a part of that, because that commitment on the behalf of the government to consult with school boards is part of what we've been doing through the governance review consultations that have been taking place.

That's why our government support for school board trustees has never been greater. Since 2003, we have increased trustees' honoraria and provided guidance, support and training to assist them in carrying out their important work. Bill 177 continues this supportive relationship by clarifying the roles of trustees, board chairs and directors of education. This bill is part of a larger commitment by this government to have everyone aligned, from parents, teachers and principals to trustees, with a sense of purpose to focus on student achievement and well-being.

Decision-making powers will continue to rest with school boards. The bill will, however, encourage boards to set higher levels of student achievement, ensure that trustees and directors understand their roles and responsibilities and ask boards to reach their goals in a fiscally responsible manner. We know that the communities look to their local school board to make sound decisions to responsibly and appropriately manage public resources and to act in the best interests of students and families. This is how the system is now and how our government believes that it should be.

I'd like to talk a little bit about my experience as a trustee, the four years that I spent as a trustee. I was privileged to serve as president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. This is a position that was also held by the member from Guelph and the Minister of Natural Resources. During that time period I was able to travel across the province. I visited virtually every school board, every public school board, in the province, spoke to trustees, and as I was talking to trustees across the province, questions were always raised about, "What

exactly is our role?" School board chairs would ask, "What exactly is my role?" Because there was confusion. Every board in the province seemed to have different ideas about what the role should actually be. Some made it a much greater role; for example, as a school board chair, some boards had the chair doing so much more, and for other boards it was strictly holding the hammer at the meeting. The roles of trustees: Trustees often wondered—you know, I talked to trustees who actually believed it was their role to go in and inspect boilers in schools. To me, that's something that should be left to the maintenance department.

1730

My board, just to give some personal background on what we did, decided to get into policy governance. That was where we set ourselves to be. We would set the rules and let the operation be handled by the professionals. Just as a demonstration of how we did that, as part of our budgeting process when I was with the Trillium Lakelands school board, we'd start our consultations in the late fall to talk about what our priorities and plans were for the following year. We would set our priorities as our plan going forward. Those priorities would drive our budget, which would take place through the spring, leading into the spring session. We would set what our priorities were for the system. We would develop a budget that supported those priorities, pass that budget, and at year-end we would receive our report on how staff did in that. We used that as a large part of our accountability process to our public when we sent our year-end report out.

As a further example of how that worked, when we hired our last director of education—who's actually retiring next week. Kathy Verduyn has spent, I believe, 35 years with the Trillium Lakelands school board. She is leaving and will be sadly missed by the board. A year after she became our director of education, she came in and said—our board at the time was struggling. We were below the provincial average on the provincial test scores. She said, "Give me some time to analyze what we need to do." She went out, and at the end of her first year she came back and said, "This is what we need to do if we're going to improve."

We had a school that had been involved in the Ontario-focused intervention program, OFIP. The school at the time had 23% of the students achieving the provincial standard, which we as a school board believed was unacceptable, because we believed that we were responsible for student achievement. The OFIP program came in with a series of extra staff, additional staff going into the school, additional resources going in. They worked with teaching staff basically to do better, to raise that. Two years from the time the OFIP program went into that school, 80% of those kids were achieving above the provincial standard. It was one of the largest improvements in the province.

Our director said that if we wanted to make those same types of improvements in our system, then what we must do is replicate that throughout our system, rather

than in one school. So our director set us up and said, "This is what it's going to cost to do it." I used to call it the SWAT teams going into the schools, where they would go in and work with staff, be in for a couple of weeks and then go to another school and another school. In the one year that we operated that, the schools within our board showed an 8% increase overall for the board, which was the largest increase by a school board in the province at that time. This was just three years ago.

So we showed how the board's decision to make the decision, saying, "Okay, we're going to have to cut some things over here because we believe in student achievement"—boards have the power do that. Trustees have the power to make those decisions which can drive student achievement.

I've heard many comments being made about the value of student testing and EQAO marks. Testing should not be used to rank schools. I think that's appalling, because I know in my board, we have our best teachers going into the schools that need the most help because they want to help drive student achievement. Student test scores should be used to address the needs of individual students.

My daughter was in grade 3 the first year the EQAO tests were introduced. She was always getting Bs in reading and writing; she was an average student. She wrote the test, we got the test results back, and she had scored a level 1 in reading. We went to the teachers the following year. We didn't go in to chastise for her lack of success in reading; we said, "What can we do, working together, as a parent, to get her up to where she should be?" We sat down with the teaching staff and we developed a reading program, assistance at school, extra work for her there, and worked with her. When she wrote it in grade 6, she was at the provincial standard, and she continued to maintain the provincial standard as she went through.

That's what student tests should be used for: to improve students and to improve the overall system, to drive improvement, not to rank schools or to punish anyone, but to say, "Where do we need to put our supports?"

This bill still will allow boards to do that. It provides clarity of what they can do, what they need to do, where they should focus their resources. Testing is just one part.

I'll be honest with this. In the 12 years that I spent as a school board trustee, I heard from teachers who didn't like the testing, and newspapers would call and say, "What's the value of it?" But in all honesty, I did not receive one phone call from a parent complaining about the tests, because parents want to know how their children are doing. Whether the child lives in Cornwall or Kenora or Sudbury or Toronto, they're going to be competing for the same positions in colleges or universities, or jobs. They want to know that their children are on an equal footing. I believe that we've made great steps in getting there.

Bill 177: I heard it said last night, from the member for Trinity-Spadina, that it would neuter trustees because they wouldn't be allowed to make these budgetary

decisions. We went through, at my board, a number of years ago and created something we called the program enhancement fund. We had been told by our superintendent of business that we had to cut \$150,000 out of our budget. Now, we're a small school board, so that was an impact. We said, "Give us options of what we have to do to make that happen," so he gave us 10 options that we could do to cut \$150,000 out of our budget.

We looked at it and we said, "Okay, we can cut this." The board has to cut the budget to balance, but what we did was look at all the options we had, and we cut about \$300,000 out of our budget—not the \$150,000 that was required to balance, but \$300,000, and we created something we called the program enhancement fund. We went to our staff and we said, "Do you have a good idea that could be replicated throughout the system that will improve student learning?" It has become the most successful program and the one that I looked forward to as a trustee within that school board, because teachers come up with the creative ideas of what they can do to improve student learning.

That was a decision that was made by trustees because we took control of the budget and we made the responsible decision. But we realized that we didn't have credit cards. The government was controlling the funding and we would live within our budgets.

Bill 177 provides clarity for the roles of chairs. Once again, this provides a job description. There are a number of people who will be looking at running municipally or for school boards next year when the municipal elections come up, and I think it's great that they will have a clear definition: "Do I want to do this job? This is the role that it will entail. Do I want to perform this role and serve my community in this way?" The clarity that's provided in this bill will allow people to look at it and say, "Yes, I think I can do this job. I think it would be helpful and I can make a difference."

I know that there are a lot of people out there who can make a difference because they'll be fighting for the children in this province, to make it a better place. There's nothing more important to our province. I always say that our province's greatest natural resource is our children, because if we don't get it right with them and make sure that they are educated properly, then what does that say about us as a society?

1740

Yesterday, much was quoted from OPSBA. The member from Trinity–Spadina had a lot of fun with me yesterday, but he was quoting from a document. He kept quoting OPSBA, saying, "They're opposed to this. They're opposed to it." He kept quoting it.

The document he was quoting from wasn't the document that was on Bill 177. The document he was quoting from was OPSBA's comment on the regulations, the consultation on regulations. Once again, our government stood up and said, "You know what? The timeline is too short, and we need to change that." The regulations will be consulted, as is required under Bill 78, but those regulations will be consulted in the fall. They will be done.

As my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga said earlier, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, both francophone school trustee associations and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education support the initiatives going forward in this bill.

Not everybody's happy with it; I agree. It has been stated. It's a democracy. Not everybody is happy with it. There are trustees in this province who won't be jumping for joy with this, but this bill will clarify their roles. Directors of education will know what their role description is. Trustees will know what their roles are. School board chairs will know what their role is. To me, this is clarity. I was proud to be a part of the school board governance review committee when it was struck. My term on that committee was interrupted when the by-election was called which brought me here.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Oh, you shouldn't have won. You could have finished the work on the committee.

Mr. Rick Johnson: I know. I could have finished the work on the committee had I stayed on it. But you know what? I feel privileged to have been able to see this bill through from its infancy, when we went out and consulted with members across the province. I was fortunate to be able to attend three of the meetings before the by-election was called. I heard from trustees.

I believe we've got it almost perfect with this. It's not completely perfect, but you know what? We're almost there. So I thank you for the time this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to the contribution by the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, with particular reference to his personal experiences in his time as a school board trustee. I find it rather interesting that the personal experiences from my perspective tend to make the case that we've been trying to make.

The member talks about a director of education who went into a school and basically streamlined it, and did a great job on a one-off basis, so much so that they created, in his words, a SWAT team that went in with the particular mandate of going out and doing that on an across-the-board—no pun intended—basis. And they were able to achieve it. That was done in his particular jurisdiction. It wasn't done because there was a mandate that went out from Education Central—and I use that term by way of referencing the ministry. This is a function of good school board trusteeship. I assume that my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock was a pretty good school board trustee.

That being the case, I have to reference again something I said in response to earlier debate. The fact is that school board trustees are not that different from every single person, no matter what party, sitting in this House today. They are sent to do a job by people who elect them. The sad fact is that they are elected by a lower number of people, much lower voter turnouts, than even we are. How many people go out to vote in the province

of Ontario in a general election? Somewhere between 50% and 60%. As far as school board trustees are concerned, they're lucky if they get 25%. So you've got a disengaged public.

What you do when you implement a cookie-cutter approach or, if I can coin another phrase, a bill that basically is a "we know better" bill, is that you say, "We're going to set the rules. We're going to do it on an across-the-board basis, province-wide," and you become, as a school board trustee, less relevant. I hazard a guess that my friend from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock would not like being a school board trustee so much under this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I find myself in a very unusual position here this afternoon, one that's so very rare, because once again I'm going to praise the comments made by a government member. I'm confident that won't happen again for a whole long time.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That was a good contribution to the discussion.

I don't share the member's enthusiasm for the bill. I don't believe that it will achieve what the government says it's going to achieve. At the same time, it's refreshing to hear a member stand up, speak without a script, include personal experience and provide some illumination for us on perhaps facets of the issue—not necessarily the bill, but the issue—that is valuable.

I just want to know this: How come two of the most effective government backbenchers are sitting not over there, but are sitting on the last row of the rump? I can't for the life of me know what's in that Premier's mind when he sends these people off into the low-oxygen area when so many of his cabinet ministers are fouling up, demonstrating gross incompetence—and yet they retain their photo shot position beside the Premier. Some of them are darn near crawling on the Premier's lap when the camera is on him.

So I say to my government counterparts and colleagues, I wish you well in your search for a more significant role in the decision-making over there. Having heard what I heard from them today, I'm confident that if the Premier's office would only listen to them—Mr. Berardinetti is laughing. Please.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I was smiling.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I wasn't being malicious in making that observation.

I may have a chance in a few minutes; I'm not going to have a whole lot of time. My question is this: Is this the Nunziata bill or the Matlow bill?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's always very entertaining to listen to the member from Welland, who is so experienced in the matters of our democratic process here in the House.

I too would like to compliment the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. He knows what he's talking about.

Let's look at it in a little bit more global way. We are very fortunate in this House to have a number of former school board trustees on all sides and a number of teachers on all sides who probably know more about the intricate working of our school system than anyone else, I would dare say. We can benefit from that, and we have benefited from that.

I try to take more of a crow's nest view as to what has been happening. When I think back on all the controversy and the strikes and the acrimony that took place within our schools, within our teaching profession, during the Harris years, and I look at all of the very positive stuff that has happened over the last five years, not only in funding our schools—now, I know that it is the role of the members of the opposition to be somewhat critical and to make suggestions for change here and there, and I fully applaud them for that; I've played that role as well on that side. But the reality still is that we are spending more money on our schools, even though the total enrolment is declining. Our students are better off. It's shown in their test results on an ongoing basis.

This is a bill that more clearly defines the various roles that the various individuals within the organization of our school system play—the role of the board, the role of the director and obviously the role of the teachers, who do all of the teaching that goes on on a day-to-day basis.

This is a good bill, and it will make Ontario a continued leader in providing the best possible education for our young people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments on Bill 177 and the comments made by others.

To the member from Welland, I was told by a man who has been here somewhat longer than I have been here that it takes good backbenchers to make good ministers, and that's what I subscribe to myself.

To the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I thought he gave a very good overview of Bill 177 when he talked about the various roles that would be affected by this legislation, trustees most importantly and foremost within the bill, but also parent councils and parent groups. I think that's very important. It's part of the whole school system. It's what makes it work best, when the whole community is involved with their school, and, most importantly, the parents of the students who are attending that school at that time.

1750

I really did appreciate his comments on testing and scores. I've always held the view that testing was indeed put in place to show what achievement levels were there, but in the main to assist, not to punish. I don't think that was the goal of testing at all, and it should not be. But I believe that, overall, his comments on Bill 177 were very apropos. He spoke about trustees, that there will be codes of conduct, parental involvement, and clarification. Even

here in this place, many of us have been chairs of some committee or other before we came to Queen's Park. Some may think it's rather simple role to do, but I happen to be a chair of a committee and, oddly enough, I got a big binder that tells me what my role is. So I don't think it's anything sinister or anything untoward that we would provide people who are affected under Bill 177 some guidance as to what is expected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'd like to thank the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, the member from Thornhill, the member from Welland and the Minister of the Environment for their comments—much appreciated.

The bottom line with all of this is that more Ontario children are graduating; more Ontario children are improving. The member from Nepean-Carleton—congratulations to her daughter starting kindergarten; she spoke about that earlier and talked about the busing issues. The day your children start school is a very important day in your life and it's one that should be treasured. But I would ask her—in her comments she talked about the busing problems—what would it be like, that system that she enrolled her child in, the public education system, if this government hadn't increased spending in education by \$5 billion over the last few years?

I was a trustee. My experience in education—my children started school; my daughter started school in 1992 under one government and then attended throughout—I was a chair of a parent council, a trustee, and then president of the provincial association. So I've worked with all governments in this, and I absolutely believe that I would be honoured to be a trustee under the guidelines of this regulation. With the clarity that it provides for the role, people will have a clear idea about what it is. Codes of conduct: What's the point of having a code if it doesn't mean anything? We have a code of conduct in this building. If you don't abide by that code, there are repercussions.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Johnson: Well, there is a code. So these are all important. These are guidelines for successful operations of an organization. I am very pleased with what we've done in this bill, seeing it go from the beginning and now, hopefully to the end, and I look forward to working with school boards as we proceed.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've only got seven minutes or so left. We could stay here until 6:15 or so, so I could use my whole 20 minutes. I am going to speak to Bill 177, to two issues in particular.

As I said earlier, is this the Christine Nunziata bill or is it the Josh Matlow bill? I want to point out those particular provisions of the bill, neither of which will assist anybody in improving the quality of education here in the province of Ontario.

I do want to thank Dr. Ed Whitcomb. He sent all of us his most recent publication, *A Short History of Ontario*. He has a Ph.D., and appears to be perhaps even retired now. It's a delightful book. It's an easy read; he doesn't pretend for it to be anything more than that. We are grateful to get these from time to time from various authors, and this one is well written.

A particularly interesting paragraph—I just started reading it at noontime: Ernest Drury, of the Ontario Farmers' Union, the Premier right after the First World War—this was in 1919, 1920.

“Drury also wondered why power plants like the Chippawa one at Niagara cost six times the original estimate. He called for studies which revealed that every Ontario Hydro project had cost far more than the estimates. He asked to see the books. Beck stalled and then provided insufficient information. Drury asked again, and demanded better accounting. Beck withdrew Hydro advertising from newspapers that took the government's side in the dispute, and made speeches condemning government policy. That called into question the degree of freedom a publicly owned utility could and should have. Drury won the battle, and the freewheeling ways of Hydro's chairman were brought under control.”

Uncanny. We're talking about 1919, 1920. It's like the “*déjà vu* all over again” observation.

I'm not prepared to dispute the validity of roles or definition of roles, but I believe that they should be guides.

Look, all of us are elected here. We come here with different agendas and we perform our role in different ways. Some of us are opposition members. We have a very different role from government members. Government members' job, if they want to stay with that caucus, is to support government legislation. It's not defined anywhere. As a government member, you don't have to if you don't want to. Back when I was a government member, I sure as heck didn't. It's your choice. Government members can choose to be oppositional in their style. Government members, never mind members of the Legislative Assembly, aren't precluded from criticizing a government decision after that decision has been made.

Mr. Bradley, although a member of the opposition at the time, was, like I was, a serious, strong and emphatic critic of wide-open gambling in the province of Ontario—the slot machines, the one-armed bandits. He railed, and I railed too, about how every corner of every block would have its own little gambling saloon with slot machines. Notwithstanding that his government calls slot machines and racetracks that don't race horses a “program,” I know that Mr. Bradley in his heart remains as concerned about those slot machines now, not only as a government member but as a cabinet minister. Of course, he can't speak about it, because that's called the unity of cabinet. He could if he didn't want to be in cabinet. But I prefer him in cabinet. He's far more valuable as one of the fair-minded people and more experienced people—most experienced, perhaps—in that cabinet.

Here, if you're a member of the Legislature, you can be an activist in the chamber. There are some people who are very involved in the day-to-day goings-on of the process of legislation. Others are more constituency-focused. Many of us try to maintain some sort of balance because we know how important our constituencies are. Some members try to develop relationships with either cabinet ministers or, more importantly, bureaucrats so they can use that to influence the decisions of those people and perhaps attract something to their riding that the riding needs. You can be eager committee members or you can be, like some are, passive committee members, where you make notes or you do crossword puzzles. It's usually government members in committee. You drive the people participating, the public members, crazy because they think, "What did I do? I've spent all this time preparing for this, and there are five government members nodding off or playing with their BlackBerrys."

There are two people in this chamber, I can tell you right now, who will never be caught playing with their BlackBerrys. One of them is the member from St. Catharines, and the other is the member from Welland. We've never had a Blackberry, don't want one, never will have one. You'd have to thrust it—I'll flip that phrase around—into my dead, cold hands before I'd ever hold on to it.

People here have choices about how they perform their roles, and they're all legitimate choices, legitimate roles. The bill would purport to restrict the choices of a trustee on a board of education.

There's nothing wrong with broad, general, feel-good principles being articulated, because that's another aspect of us—it could be perceived as, really, the feel-good statements. Of course, you're supposed to be concerned about the students' interest and the students' welfare and success. Of course, you're supposed to be prudent in managing resources, taxpayers' money, that's allotted to you, and yesterday Rosario Marchese was speaking to that. Of course, this is logical.

Josh Matlow had the temerity, the gall, to criticize how the Toronto board dealt with a particular situation. He was brought up on charges by his colleagues. They presented and tabled a motion of censure. It's only because they ran out of time that they didn't get to it.

Matlow, to his credit—again, outspoken, as he should be. But that was his choice. There are some board members—just think, there are some elected people who shy from the limelight—very few. But he had a choice. He wanted to make sure that the public knew that he had great concerns. How the board handled it—I believe it was a matter of a disease epidemic at a particular school.

I'm going to carry on next time this bill is called, Speaker. Thank you kindly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you to the member from Welland.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday morning, September 17.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Leeanna Pendergast
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
David Oraziotti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
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**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
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Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
Yasir Naqvi, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Reza Moridi, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
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Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Khalil Ramal
Bas Balkissoon, Jim Brownell
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Khalil Ramal
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Ted Arnott, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Jerry J. Ouellette
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
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Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
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Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
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