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Thursday 16 September 2010

Jeudi 16 septembre 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 16 September 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 16 septembre 2010

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

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY TAX CREDIT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR LES ACTIVITÉS DES ENFANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 15, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 99, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the children's activity tax credit / Projet de loi 99, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour les activités des enfants.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'll take my two minutes this morning to talk about the activity tax credit, but I just want to give a bit of a plug here this morning. The Peterborough Lakers are now in the Mann Cup, which is the Canadian national championship for lacrosse, in Peterborough against the New Westminster Salmonbellies.

Many of the players on the Peterborough Lakers—John Grant Jr., Scott Self, John Tavares—were youngsters who came up through the Peterborough minor lacrosse system. Lacrosse in Peterborough is almost like the Peterborough Petes to hockey. We've always been a community that has been recognized for both hockey and lacrosse.

For those young folks in Peterborough who have the opportunity to sign up for minor lacrosse—Karen and I signed up our own children, Braden and Shanae, a week ago for Peterborough minor basketball. When I had that opportunity, I was chatting with a large number of parents at the signup, and they were very enthusiastic about this tax credit, which is retroactive to January 1, 2010. So I encourage people to keep their receipts for signing up for those spring sports like soccer.

Now we're moving into the fall for basketball and hockey, and since we have a really aggressive and very extensive minor sport system in the Peterborough area, I encourage those parents to take advantage of this. It's

great that it allows people—we have Market Hall in Peterborough, which has a young people's theatrical program, and they'll be able to sign up for that this fall. This is something that I think is seen as a very progressive measure throughout Ontario.

I encourage people, if they want to take the opportunity, to come to Peterborough Memorial Centre. The Lakers play both Friday night and Saturday night. Tickets are reasonable: \$24 for an adult. This is an opportunity to see—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to respond to the excellent presentation that was made by my colleague the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka regarding this children's tax credit that was introduced by the government this week.

I think this is certainly an acknowledgement on the part of the government of the anger we are seeing throughout the province of Ontario since they introduced their HST on July 1. They've already had to give back a tax credit to people—just for one year, mind you—in order to deal with some of the anger we're seeing out there. But I think one of the issues that probably hit families the hardest was the HST, the additional 8% on children's activities, whether it's sport or music or others. So now the province is saying, "Okay, if you spend \$500, we'll give you a tax credit of \$50." Well, I would say to you that that isn't a lot of money, and I would say that it is also not fair.

There are many people in this province who can't pay money in order to enrol their daughter or son in activities. I know that from personal experience. I know that from the people I meet in my riding of Kitchener–Waterloo. They would love to enrol their children in skating lessons, hockey, music or what have you. But I'll tell you: It costs far more than that, and this measly little \$50 tax credit isn't going to help these particular families.

Again, this government knows that Ontarians are angry with the HST—it's going to cost them at least \$1,000 extra per year—and they're just trying to respond and deflect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'd just like to thank the member from Peterborough and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for their comments on this bill.

The whole idea of the bill is not to pay the whole shot. This is just to provide assistance to families. I have

nieces and nephews; the extra \$50, or \$100 if you've got a couple of children, will help.

It's interesting to hear the criticism of this. When the federal Conservative Party put in a tax credit for this, this must be good, but this one is considered bad. The fact that it will be able to assist families with sports, music and other things that enrich children's lives—it helps. It's not supposed to be a subsidy; it's just supposed to be something that will help kids become physically involved, something that will help them to go to sign up for programs.

0910

We had more calls after this bill was announced two weeks ago, when this program was announced at my office, than we did on July 2, because parents were happy with this. They said, "You know what? It doesn't subsidize the whole thing, but it gives us a little bit of assistance." For the other party to slam it, for the opposition party to say this is not—I remember in 1997, when payments were sent out across the province to parents, and they were raving about what a good thing this was. But you combine this with the tax savings that have been presented for low-income families—we doubled the Ontario tax benefit to \$1,100. The subsidies that have been provided, the reduction in the income tax—all of these things are part of our new tax plan that we are moving forward with to support low-income families, to support Ontario families and to provide a little bit of relief. I'm happy with this, with what we're proposing, and I'm looking forward to hearing the rest.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Frank Klees: I don't think anyone can argue with the fact that we want to encourage families and make it easier for families to encourage their young people to be involved in sporting activities. No one is arguing that. What we take umbrage with is the fact that this sop is coming from a government that on the one hand has reached into the pockets of hard-working families and basically ripped out \$1,000 through their HST, and now they want applause from members of the opposition for the measly \$50 that they're going to return so that the child can participate in sports.

Let me ask the member this: What sport is there where \$50 is going to make a significant difference, given the fact that every time a family takes their children and puts them in the car and fills that car up, they're going to be paying at least \$500 a year more simply to fill up the tank of gas that takes the kids to and from their activities? This is simply one more example of this government being in such disconnect with hard-working families in this province. It's a shame. The fact of the matter is that what this government should be doing is recognizing that they're making it virtually impossible for families to continue to be engaged in recreational activities through their continuous plan of tax and spend, and the result of that is that people in this province are angry with them. This will not in any way make them feel any better about this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes for his response.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, first of all, to the member from Peterborough for his comments. I was wondering when he was going to get to Bill 99, because it did sound a bit like an advertisement for lacrosse in Peterborough for the first part of his comments—although he did mention the cost of going to the lacrosse game that he was advertising as being \$24 for a ticket. Just think about it. This bill is going to give families \$50 back. Well, their \$50—if just two of them go to this lacrosse game, they will have used the full \$50. That's what we're talking about: \$50. I think that shows just how little a difference it's actually going to make.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo correctly pointed out that there is a lot of anger out there, that families are concerned about the fact of the HST, that 8% going on the gas when they drive to their soccer game or their hockey game, about other increased costs like the eco tax—which has been put on the shelf, for a month or two anyway—the extra cost of insurance, the significantly higher costs of energy that are happening day by day in the province. So families don't have any money left; they don't have the money left to be able to spend the \$500 to get the 10% credit so they'll get the \$50 back.

As has been pointed out, the government has been reaching into the pockets of families. They're taking \$1,000 out just in the HST, and there's just no money left.

I'd also like to thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for his comments, and of course the member from Newmarket–Aurora, who did point out that the McGuinty government keeps reaching into the pockets of those families.

There's nothing left. Families can't afford that \$500 to be able to get the \$50 back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Some pieces of legislation that come before us are very large, some are very complex, some have a huge impact on the lives of people in this province and some are just puppies. It's hard not to like a puppy: It's little; it's cute. It doesn't bring home the bacon and, frankly, a picture of a puppy on an election flyer is something that everyone would love. I expect that this piece of legislation is going to be part of that.

I just want to note that I will be sharing some of my time with my colleague Mr. Miller from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I can see this piece of legislation now in a television commercial, with kids coming home from their hockey game, parents working through their tax forms, looking up, smiling and being happy that for all the money they've put out, they're going to get back \$50. And I think the amount may well not be mentioned in the commercial. But this particular piece of legislation can't miss; it has got to be there because it's going to be seen as a friendly puppy helping a family.

But, Speaker, as you know, as I know and as everyone else in this Legislature knows, people are going to be facing increased costs to send their kids to hockey or to take their kids to a live performance. People are going to be faced with increased costs from the HST that will more than eat up what's brought before us in this piece of legislation.

As you well know, the simple reality is that in this province, in schools, administrations have difficulty getting together the money to actually provide school bands with instruments. As I said when this bill was introduced, a friend of mine works in a public school in Toronto, and when they find that an instrument is gone, that's it; it gets taken out of the curriculum. They don't have other money. Some schools do much better because they have the ability, because of the population they serve, to raise money at school events, and they buy instruments, which is a wonderful thing. But, frankly, in all schools across this province, there should be adequate funding for arts and for music so that every child who has that ability or every child who has not yet discovered that they have that ability gets a chance to participate in the arts. This bill will not deal with that shortfall in our education system.

When this bill was introduced the other day, I was talking to my colleague the member from Kenora-Rainy River, who said that his calculation of this bill is that it wouldn't even cover the HST on the hockey fees that he pays every year for his children, who are active in amateur hockey. I have to tell you, it's not a bad idea to have a refundable tax credit, because there are a lot of people whose income is so little that they actually wouldn't be able to claim simply a deduction; they need a repayment. But, in general, those are people who don't have 500 bucks to scratch together to put into fees at the beginning of the year, and have to wait six months, eight months, a year before they get their \$50 back. That impact on those people is going to be quite low. What they need is adequate funding of our schools so that sports and the arts are provided at a very high level, with good quality, so that they don't have to worry about scraping together the money to send their kids to these particular activities. Those activities are already provided as part of what we give to our children in this province.

0920

There are a lot of other areas where one can speak about the reduction in affordability of this province because of initiatives of this government—reductions in affordability because this government is spending money unwisely. I cite the smart meters as a particular case in point—situations where people are going to see reductions in their standard of living, not because, in fact, we're expanding public services, but because we're spending money stupidly. This bill doesn't do that. It gives people a break. It's \$50. I say to you and I say to all those who may at some point receive that \$50: Don't spend it all in one shot.

It isn't a big bill. I don't have long comments. I cede the floor to my colleague Mr. Miller.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: As my colleague pointed out—and of course I heard some talk from the other side, “Well, are you going to vote for it?” Of course we are. We're not going to take anything out of the taxpayers' pockets. However, once again it's a quarter or a 10th of what they should be doing. It's one of those half-baked bills that you have no choice other than to support, because they will turn around and say, “Oh, you're against children,” or, “You're against this” if you don't vote for it. It's a joke.

Let's talk about the \$50. Let's talk about that. Okay, I've got two kids in hockey, let's say. Average ice-skate sharpening is 5 bucks. So for two kids, that's 50 bucks—five skate sharpenings is my break. Wow, that's a biggie. Twenty-five bucks each over a whole season, and they probably get their skates sharpened 20 or 15 times over a season. I used to sharpen my skates before every game, when I played. So that's a real joke.

Let's talk about hockey registration. Oh, they're probably 160 bucks or 150 bucks just to register, plus your HST. Well, there goes the 50 bucks—plus. Let's talk about any sport you want. What is 50 bucks going to do?

Let's talk about administration costs for sending out the cheque. There's going to be something there.

Let's talk about the service clubs. They didn't even mention the service clubs in this bill. In my riding, 20% of the people are living below the poverty level. They can't afford to put one kid, let alone two kids, into sports, and they're going to allow them, for \$500, 50 bucks. They don't have the \$500 to put into sports. What do they do? They go to the service clubs—the Lions Club, the Optimist Club. These clubs, through their generosity, support the kids in different types of sports, donate, buy their shirts, buy their sweaters and buy their skates, or whatever they need. They can't declare it because they're not a family. But they're supporting hundreds of kids of my community. What break do they get? Nothing.

Fifty dollars? What's that going to do? I don't know. Jeez, a haircut is 20 bucks. Fifteen bucks for a haircut. I don't know.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Well, vote against it.

Mr. Paul Miller: So when they sit there and say, “Vote against it,” that is such nonsense. They know, any party knows, they're not going to take anything from the voter if it's a benefit. They know that. For them to do that is a cheap shot, and for them to say—of course we're going to support it. But you know what one member of the official opposition said here yesterday? He said that it's peanuts. I wouldn't even classify it as peanuts; I'd say it's fine grind. It's minuscule.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: What did you say?

Mr. Paul Miller: Fine grind. It's nothing. It'll be eaten up in the first day of their registration.

Don't fool yourselves out there: The government's giving you a little piece. There will be more gifts coming along as it gets near election day. Little tidbits will be coming out—Timbits, I call them—to entice the voters to

vote for this party again. I hope they're not fooled. I hope they don't take these little Timbits and think how wonderful the Liberals are. Please, don't let them fool you again, because once again they're going to break 200, 300 promises down the road, like they always do after an election.

When I look at this whole situation and all the bills that are going to come forward in the next few months, trust me, it's not going to be any great benefit to the people of Ontario. It's simply to con them into voting for the same government, the same old, same old. There's not a lot to say about this, because the bill is three pages long. It is a nothing bill—another nothing bill, I might add—and it will do nothing to support or help the people in this province for their sports activities. Believe me, it is a zero bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The honourable member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join the debate this morning, which is very lively and heated. But I'd like to begin my comments calm and to the point. This is good for Ontario families. Bill 99, the Children's Activity Tax Credit Act, is good for Ontario families. We can hear all the complaints in the world from the opposition. I think the reason we're hearing such fussiness and emotion this morning is because the opposition knows it's a good thing for kids and a good thing for Ontario families, and we're hearing that from them.

We've heard the opposition tell us that this is a joke.

Mr. Paul Miller: It is.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's no joke to help Ontario families. The McGuinty government has a list of concerted efforts focused to help Ontario families and help Ontario children. We've just seen the implementation of full-day learning in the province of Ontario. This is another step forward to help Ontario families.

Frankly, to sit here in the House and hear the opposition complain that it's not enough, it's not enough—my goodness, they sound like my three sons: "Mom, it's not enough. We want to do more. It's not enough." The adult thing to do here is to say, "It's a step forward." It's a modest step forward, but at the end of the day, it is a step forward to help Ontario families.

I have three sons. Fifty dollars per son is \$150. When you couple that with the federal tax credit of \$75, I'm now receiving \$125 per child, times three.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's a lot of money.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you. This is a lot of money. These are difficult times, and the McGuinty government recognizes that these are difficult times in the province of Ontario. These are difficult times around the world. So it's unacceptable for anyone to stand in this House and publicly say that this is a joke. It is no joke that Ontario families are looking for assistance, and the McGuinty government is giving them that assistance. Bill 99 today assists parents to allow their children to partici-

pate in physical and non-fitness activities across the province of Ontario, and I'm proud to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to applaud the member who has just spoken. I think he makes excellent points based on his own personal experience of having children who are involved in sports activities. I think he has pointed out how minuscule the impact of this tax is on families like his own. But I think what is more important is the fact that this tax is an attempt on the part of the McGuinty government to respond to the anger that people in the province of Ontario are feeling because of the increased cost of living.

On July 1, this government introduced the HST. We know it's going to cost the average family about \$1,000 extra a year and it's going to hit children's activities, because what has happened is that children's activities are now of course subject to the HST, which they were not before. It has increased the cost to families for the participation of their children in activities. So do you know what? This hasn't really been done in an attempt to give back to families; it's a recognition of the fact that Ontarians are angry. They're angry about the HST. The government now probably realizes they've made a mistake. They've already had to give the public one rebate for the first year of the HST.

But you know, this HST and these increased taxes are just part of what Ontarians are seeing. They're seeing increased energy rates, which are really going through the roof and are going to cause increasing hardship. They're seeing their auto insurance rates go up. There was an attempt by this government to impose an eco tax, which we'll see again. So this tax credit, much as it is good for children, doesn't achieve its objective.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and make comments about this particular bill. I do remember when the official opposition came forward and were giving families, I believe, \$100 back. It was something that Jesse Ventura had come up with as governor of Minnesota. I think they rather copied Mr. Ventura at the time, and they thought it was wonderful. Here we have a possibility where a family of two could get \$100 back, which would be a similar amount of money as the official opposition did. Of course, if they have more children than that in one family, it would be \$50 times whatever that number might be. I also want to point out that this is also available at \$100 for disabled children.

0930

There is no mail-out. The opposition are talking about the cost of mail and stamps and postage. This is a tax credit; it's on their tax form. It will be done automatically. There is no mailing involved here. Further to that, even people who file and pay no income tax in that particular year will still qualify. So it's good for everyone concerned who files.

Not only does this cover sports, but it covers music, as has been mentioned, and Cubs, Scouts and Girl Guides.

So there's a wide range of opportunities here. I think it's going to help families overall. Seventy-five million dollars is a sizable amount of money, I would suggest to all who are listening here. I think it goes a long way to recognizing, on our government's part, the challenges that families face. I think it is a credible and worthwhile endeavour, and I look forward to seeing just who does vote for and against this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to respond and, I hope, correct some of the misimpressions from the folks across the way. I really am offended by the notion that a tax credit that is worth 10%, or in the case of disabled children 20%, of the value of what you're claiming is somehow peanuts. I challenge you to find tax credits that are in excess of that. That is a very generous tax credit, and in particular it's a refundable tax credit, which does help low-income folks. So if in fact you don't owe income tax because you have low income, if you file for this tax credit, you will get a cheque in the mail even if you don't owe taxes because it's a fully refundable tax credit.

I had an opportunity to do an announcement in my community. The reaction that I have gotten has been 100% positive. In particular, not only are the sports organizations very pleased that they will now be able to essentially double, because they're getting the federal Tory tax credit—which apparently the opposition thinks is good; they will now be getting double the tax credit that they qualify for now. They think it's great. The arts organizations, people who do music lessons, drama lessons, dance lessons, tutoring for your child, all sorts of things that were not previously available, are absolutely thrilled that they're now included.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): NDP members have up to two members for a response.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity and the efforts of my colleagues from Kitchener–Conestoga, Kitchener–Waterloo, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Guelph to address my very brief remarks. In fact, I think the commentary may exceed the time that I actually spoke about the bill.

Let's be clear about this: People in Ontario appreciate the idea that they would get some of the extra money they're spending on the HST back on their income tax, and those who can afford to put the up-front cash out for arts or sports activities will be able to garner a credit of up to \$50. You know, we throw the \$50 figure around a lot; it may well just be ten bucks. It may be 15; it may be five. I don't know precisely what people will get, but one can't assume that one will always get that maximum fee of \$50.

I liken this bill to a puppy because, in fact, it isn't something you can hate; it just isn't going to actually make the difference that needs to be made for the families in this province. The people in this province are facing a situation where schools often are in bad physical condition, where students don't get access to arts pro-

grams the way they need to get them, where parents come to me utterly frustrated about the lack of daycare and the lack or the slowness with which early learning is being introduced to the extent that some will see nothing until their children are too old to benefit from such a program. Those are the large items. Those are the big issues that need to be addressed.

What we have before us today is an item that will show up in political television commercials, that will show up on flyers, but in the end, it won't address the fundamental problems facing the families in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It is a pleasure to rise this morning to talk about the Ontario children's activity tax credit.

Just before I get into that, a member from the opposition, in one of the two-minute responses, made a comment about the Peterborough Lakers: that the \$24 was an advertisement, and "How much is \$50 going to buy you?" The opposition seems to talk about doom and gloom—and I understand that; that's part of their job—but they should really fill in some of the blanks. I'm going to use the Lakers tickets that the member brought up. Those tickets probably have gone down this year. Do you know why? Because the former entertainment tax of 10% has now gone down to 8%. When you combine the two, it's 13%; before it used to be 15%. They don't talk about that.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Three thousand people on Saturday night.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You talk about 3,000 people in that stadium. If anything, those tickets are more affordable this year than they were last year.

They don't tell the whole—can I say "truth"? The whole story.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: The whole story.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The whole story. They should say that—the whole truth.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's not enough. I haven't heard one of the members from either opposition party tell us—what would you have done? How much would you have given back to these families? I hear that \$50 is not enough, that it doesn't do anything.

I'm a proud father of four kids and the grandfather of nine grandkids, and I was just taking a quick count; six of my nine grandkids are involved in some type of activity that's covered by this. Doing some quick math, between the federal and the provincial, it's about \$600 to my immediate family a year.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's a lot.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: That's a lot of money. So for the members of the opposition to scoff and laugh at that, I just don't get it.

I remember—some of us were here who are sitting here this morning—when the federal government introduced their \$50 credit. I remember distinctly when the opposition, both parties, petitioned this government to do

the right thing like the federal Harper government did. It took us a couple of years—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: It was a great idea.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It was a great idea.

Frankly, we're not supposed to talk about what happens within caucus meetings, but I remember some of our members lobbying the Minister of Finance, who I think was Mr. Sorbara at that time, that we should carbon-copy what Prime Minister Harper and his government did back in those days so that we were in sync.

Yes, it's \$50, but I can tell you that some families—and I'm talking about families where mom or dad has lost their job. That's a reality we face in this global experience of challenges in the last couple of years. To a family, kids in general—and I would say in general—come first in the sense that any parent will do anything for their child. Yes, they were struggling to register little Johnny for hockey or dance or music lessons, but they knew how important that was.

I can tell you that what I heard, contrary to what some of the members are saying they're hearing now, is: "We need some help. If there's anything you can do, let's keep those kids active; let's keep those kids off the streets; let's maybe take those kids away from playing their video game in front of the TV and give them some physical exercise, whether it's dance or those things." I believe and I know that this is the right move.

0940

The question is always, is it enough? Frankly, I'm not sure what is enough, and I would encourage the members from the opposition, instead of saying, "No, no, no, no, no," that this is not good, to tell us what they think is good. I hope, although they're talking the way they're talking here during the debate, that in their heart they find a way to support this, because it might be little, as they say, but it's better than what they've got to offer. I haven't heard from them—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: It's just negative.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They're just being negative. The talk is that it's a disgrace; it's a shame; we should be embarrassed. Well, a \$75-million commitment to give back to some folks, especially dealing with kids' activities—I think that's a lot of money. It might not be a lot of money to them, but where I come from, in my family, that is a lot of money.

I'm really struggling with this, "Oh, it's a disgrace. It's only \$50." Well, I can tell you, in my household, and I'm sure in a lot of households, we spend time clipping coupons for 50 cents because when we go to the grocery store, that 50 cents is something—20 cents, \$1. We spend time clipping those coupons so that when we go to the grocery store or when we go to buy—you clip a coupon for when you get a pair of hockey gloves to save \$5.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: We do it at our home. It's money. It's really hard to wrap your head around those kinds of things.

I talked a little bit about how this tax credit emulates somewhat the federal tax credit, but I want to take a

minute to point out that yes, it emulates it, but it goes two steps further. We could have emulated the federal tax credit program when the federal government did it; the Ministry of Finance assessed it. Based on what we hear on the street on the federal tax credit—which, by the way, was applauded by the official opposition when that happened, and it was only \$50. It was good then; it's not good now.

What did we hear? Kids taking dance lessons or those other activities were not dealt with accordingly as someone who played hockey or soccer. I'm going to talk about some of those different things. We hear a lot of that.

The other thing that it did is—this is probably using Tory talk—it benefited the wealthy, the people who could afford to put their kids in the sports activities. Frankly, where I come from, there are a lot of families that are in an income bracket that don't pay any taxes. They were shut out; totally ignored. The people who need the tax credit the most were shut out.

So what did we do? We fixed those two things. Our list of activities that people can claim up to \$50 for, I'll tell you, just taking a quick glance at some of the obvious things, it's double or triple what the federal credit qualifies for. But what I think is even more important, or just as important, is the fact that the families that have an income level where they don't pay much tax or don't pay any tax are actually going to get a cheque back for up to 50 bucks. How can we argue with that? I just don't get where the opposition is coming from.

What have I heard in the week or so since we made this announcement? Just the other night I was at the Cobourg Cougars opening game, and unfortunately they played the Trenton Golden Hawks—both teams are in my riding.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Oh, dear. Who do you cheer for?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Who do we cheer for? In my mind, both teams won, but the Cobourg Cougars did win 4 to 1. But both teams won.

So what did I hear in those arenas? What did I hear when I went to my granddaughter's hockey practice last week? I think my daughter was the first one to say, "Dad, that was a good thing." And I'm going to admit that she said, "But it could have been a little bit better; it could have been a little bit more." That's the reality. When is enough? But then, as I talked to some parents, they told me the same thing. Yes, some of them did say, "Well, it could have been a little bit bigger cheque." Yes, I will not lie about that. But all I can say is, they thanked us for putting the initiative forward.

In the limited time we have here, I wanted to talk about some of the activities that this covers: badminton, ball hockey, chess, choir, baseball, cooking for kids—organized classes where they pay a fee—different crafts courses, drama, dance, even first aid courses, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts—and even for uniforms. So, if somebody doesn't tell me this is a benefit to Main Street Ontario families, I must be missing something.

As we move forward and hopefully this legislation gets passed, the other thing that I want to point out is that

when it gets passed, it will be effective January 1, 2010. So, for some, this money they have spent already, they qualify, and in the seven years I've been here, there are not too many times that that happens. Normally, we do something and it's two years down the road. We'll get there. We're going back, because we know this is important; this is something the families were asking for. I commend the Minister of Finance for understanding, under these difficult times—\$75 million is a lot of money for government to commit to on a permanent basis. This is not a one-timer; this is on a permanent basis.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: And it's indexed.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Yes, and it is indexed.

So I can tell you that this is good news. The member opposite from the third party can see this in a brochure.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm proud to put it in my brochure. I will put it in my brochure, and I would hope that the member opposite will put it in his brochure. If you're truly representing your constituents, yes, you want to report the doom and gloom, but tell them about the good things for their kids and families. Please—since he offered that, whether we're going to put it in my brochure, I probably will, because I'm proud of what this government has done. I'm proud to be part of a government that cares about families. I would encourage the members of the opposition to put that in their brochures, because the more we can tell people—because frankly, sometimes, one of the things I find is that governments have a lot of programs. Sometimes they're cumbersome, and sometimes they don't know. When I go and speak to different groups—seniors, for example—about some of the tax credits, they don't know they even exist. So the more we can make them aware of it—I would encourage members of the opposition to help us tell the good story, to put this in their brochures, put this in their householders, put this in their monthly, weekly, yearly newsletters, because we want to make sure that those families get the benefit from this.

I've talked about some of the things that are eligible, and the list is fairly long. We're talking about, for example, kids taking ski lessons. We live in Ontario. Not very far from the GTA, we have some world-class, state-of-the-art skiing facilities. I'm not a skier, but I know that I visit them, and kids taking skiing lessons in the middle of winter—what an opportunity, and they will be able to get some credit back for that.

One of the things I've failed to mention is that kids with disabilities are always faced with different challenges because, whether it is a piece of equipment or whether it's registration because it needs more attention, those fees are always higher. I was in the beautiful hamlet of Bewdley on Sunday—

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's a great spot. They used to have a newspaper, the Bewdley Bugle.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: That's right—for the opening of their renewed sports centre, a state-of-the-art facility, a beautiful arena. There is this one woman who has a challenged daughter—they moved from the Toronto area, I

believe, some three or four years ago—and she started a sledge hockey team in beautiful Bewdley in the municipality of Hamilton township, just north of Cobourg. Of course, Bewdley is on the south shore of beautiful Rice Lake. I had an opportunity to talk to this mother. They're getting calls from all over southern Ontario about having their child take part in this sledge hockey team.

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First of all, it's very affordable. It's in a small community; their expenses are not all that great. The community, the municipality, because of the programs they're offering—and it's really welcome news—are helping them out with some ice fees and so forth, so it does make it very, very attractive.

So the parents of those kids who take part in this sledge hockey team are going to benefit by about \$100 from that provincial—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Per child.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Per child.

I was going to say that we know what it's like to have somebody disabled in your family, but I really can't say that because I don't have any. But I can only picture it; I can only think. So anything that we can do to help those folks I know they'll appreciate. I know for a fact they'll appreciate it.

As my time ticks down, regardless of what folks from the opposition would say to you—"That's not enough"—I want to empower them for a couple of things. Let them put their best foot forward and tell us what this should really be.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: What would they do?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: What would they do? Because it's not only on this issue: The doom and gloom parties of the opposition—they talk about doom and gloom—have never put their best foot forward to let us know what they're going to do. All they can tell you is that the sky is going to fall in every day. Well, you know, the sky's not going to fall in—at least, I don't think it is.

More importantly, although they criticize this to no end, I know in their own ridings and in their own constituencies, there are families with kids, and those families could benefit from this. Like I said a minute ago, although on the surface they seem to be opposing this, I want them to tell those parents, "Yes, it might not be enough"—let them even put their own spin on it—"but please take part. Take the benefit that's available to you." I would encourage you, I am asking you, to tell the families in your own ridings that if—when—this legislation is passed, they're entitled to that extra incentive at the end of each year.

To close off, I really want to encourage all sides that when it comes to helping families, when it comes to helping kids, we need to park our partisan hats somewhere and do what's best for families. I think this is one of those things that's best for families.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to respond to the speech from the member from Northumberland—Quinte

West. The member was making my point for me, in that what I've been saying is that this is more about next year's election, and it's for the government to be seen to be giving some money back to help families out.

He raised the question. He said, "It's going to take effect January 1, 2010. It's retroactive, and that's very unusual." I think those were his words. Guess what? Why is it retroactive? What's next year? It's an election year. So, come spring, all of these families are going to be receiving the \$50. I think it's the government's hope that they'll remember where it came from. I think that answers the question about why it's retroactive.

But I simply have to say that the reason we're critical of it—I'll respond to one other question. They asked: What would we have done? We wouldn't have been a tax-and-spend government like this government has been. That has necessitated them to have their hand in the pocket of taxpayers continually for such things as the HST, which, as the member from Kitchener–Waterloo pointed out, is a \$1,000 extra charge.

The list goes on and on and on of the extra charges that Ontario families are facing. So \$50 is not going to be very significant for them when they're paying an extra \$1,000 for the HST and when every week there's another announcement about energy costs going up. There was 10%, and then there's the HST on it. Then there are the smart meters, which are putting the rate up dramatically for prime-time use. We had the eco tax, which has disappeared for a few months, but it's going to be coming back. We have, of course, the health tax this government brought into effect. We have auto insurance that, if you have the same coverage, is going up. If you happen to live in the city of Toronto, you have significantly increased charges.

So \$50 isn't going to mean that much when taxes have gone up so much under this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions or comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to address the member from Northumberland–Quinte West's comments. He mentioned that he has a large family and that he is very proud of the fact that they're getting all these breaks.

But what he doesn't mention is the fact that you have to spend \$500 to get the \$50. I don't know what part of the province he's from, but in my area, they don't have the \$500 in the first place to even get the tax credit—in fact, they can't even put one child in—because 20% of the people in my riding are below the poverty level. They go to the service clubs, they go to get help from the community, and they can't declare it.

Then he said that it's going to be \$100 for kids who are challenged. Well, \$100—a lot of these kids require special equipment for sledding and that. Are they going to pay HST on that? I think they are. Are they going to pay HST on the registration fee? I think they are. You can kiss that \$50 or \$100 goodbye there; that's a start.

What the member doesn't mention is that most people in this province aren't in the six figures in the money they receive. Naturally, grandpa and grandma can kick

out extra money if the kids can't afford to play because their working parents can't afford it; they go to grandpa and grandma. Let me assure the member that most of the people in this province don't make \$100,000 a year. That's another bit of a grey area that he didn't talk about.

The other member talked about the 100% response from her sports clubs and her community. I'll tell the truth: I never received one phone call or one email about this great \$50—not one. I don't know who the 100% are. I guess 100% of two phone calls might be 100% of two phone calls.

They're really putting a grey area around this big break. Trust me: This is no big break. He asked what we would do. We would give a heck of a lot more, because you've spent hundreds of millions of dollars on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very pleased to respond to the speech from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. I think we'll all want to support any kind of a tax credit to young people. I know many of us have children and grandchildren who participate in a lot of sports, and sure, \$50 is \$50. Whether it's \$25, \$50, \$100—whatever it may be—we'll take any help we can get.

I think what he failed to mention is that for every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario—the public accounts just came out a week ago, and there's just under a \$20-billion deficit for the past year. That translates into around \$1,500 for every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario. This government has added another \$1,500 to the accumulated debt in the province of Ontario to every man, woman and child, and they're going to brag about giving \$50 back. We've still got a deficit there for every man, woman and child of \$1,450. I didn't hear him talk about anything to do with debt. He just seems to zero in on these little gains that make them happy, and they hope they'll get some kind of support in the next provincial election.

But I can tell you that nothing could be further from the truth. I think the public has caught on to this government. They've caught on to the smart meters this week. It's just a weekly barrage of mismanagement of this economy. And you know what? It might be an election ploy now, but I think next October 6 the citizens of the province of Ontario will reward this government and kick them out of office.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? Seeing none, the honourable member for Northumberland–Quinte West has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank the three members who made some comments, and I want to talk a little bit about each one of them in the two minutes I have.

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka talked about how the HST is costing families \$1,000 per person or whatever, \$1,000 more per year. He doesn't talk about the tax credits that those working people are getting back.

He leaves that out of the equation. He forgets that folks with low or no income get a PST tax credit of up to \$260 a year. He doesn't talk about that.

He talked about the rising insurance premiums. Some of us, including me sometimes, have very short memories. I remember that during their era in government for six years, insurance premiums went up over 40%. What did they do? They walked away from it. "Fend for yourself." And what did we do when we formed government? We reduced those premiums. They talk about insurance premiums going up in the last little while, or that are going to go up—in the very short time that they were the government, over 40%. He doesn't tell that.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The member from Hamilton East answers my question, "Well, what would you offer?" His answer was, "A lot more." Wow. That really makes those parents feel much better. Man, that really satisfies people on the street.

Mr. Paul Miller: Seventy-five million dollars. Wowiee.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: "Wowiee," he says. I just heard him say, "\$75 million. Wowiee."

The member from Simcoe North talked about the debt. Well, you know it's not only Ontario with a debt; it's the world with a debt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to join the debate on Bill 99, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the children's activity tax credit.

Our critic from Parry Sound–Muskoka has done an outstanding job of conveying the position of our party on this piece of legislation, this tax credit for children, and also to point out the concerns we have about what is happening here—not so much about the tax credit itself, but certainly what has happened prior to the introduction of this tax credit and the environment that has been created in this province that at the end of the day really amounts to this being minimal tax relief for families after they have been so heavily burdened by the McGuinty government, who have ushered in in recent months—in fact, ever since they were elected in 2003—a long line of increases to family budgets.

This act provides for a children's activity tax credit. We've heard from the member for Northumberland–Quinte West that the great thing is that it's unusual but it's going to be retroactive to January 2010. Well, we know why this is unusual: The government is aware of the public anger out there, so they're hoping people will see this tax credit next spring and be impressed. However, based on what I'm hearing in my own constituency of Kitchener–Waterloo, people in the province of Ontario are very concerned about the hits to their pocketbook over and over again.

I would say to you, I support a tax credit. In fact, we're going to support this. I do think it's important that children have an opportunity to participate in physical activity, in music and drama, in whatever they have an

interest in doing. However, I think we also have to recognize that not everybody is going to get the \$50. It's going to depend on how much you have been able to afford to invest in your child. So the \$50 is a maximum, but if you have only been able to afford to invest \$100 in your child for these types of activities, I hope the public isn't fooled and thinks that they are going to get the \$50 tax credit, because they won't. I guess that is my only concern about this piece of legislation, the fact that not all families can afford to spend \$500.

We've heard now that school fees have been increasing and families are being asked to pay for more and more in the way of what should be considered a basic necessity at school. We're hearing they have to pay these activity fees to participate in athletics. They're having to pay for music. They're having to pay for some science materials. Families in this province can't afford all of these fees. They can't afford the increases that they're seeing on what used to be basic necessities in our schools.

They also cannot afford the HST, which this government introduced on July 1, which has really contributed to driving up the cost of enrolling their children in these activities—the government now is saying they recognize that it was a mistake. It probably is causing some hardship and so they've introduced this, in some respects as a public relations measure, to provide some minimal tax relief to families. But that's after the average family, now with the HST that was introduced on July 1, is going to be paying about \$1,000 more per year. So this is just a small initiative that is going to provide a little bit of relief. That's what we need to recognize.

This government, since 2003, when the Premier first said before the election, "I'm not going to raise your taxes," did raise our taxes. Families ended up having to pay the health fee. Well, I can tell you that that health premium has brought in about \$15 billion, but that money has come out of the pockets of hard-working families who actually believed the Premier in 2003 that he wasn't going to raise their taxes. Now they see a government and a Premier who have changed. The first thing that they witnessed was this health premium. So, again, we look at Bill 99, but this is minimal tax relief compared to what the public is seeing.

Then, of course, we've had the Green Energy Act that was introduced. It's very important to conserve energy. However, according to London Economics International, this Green Energy Act that the McGuinty government introduced is going to cost Ontario \$46 billion from 2010 to 2025. That is equivalent to \$631 per household per year. Look at all that money. This tax credit, Bill 99, is minimal in comparison to what Ontario families are going to have to pay. Then, they tried to sneakily introduce an eco tax on the same day as they introduced the HST initiative, on July 1. That was going to be on 9,000 products. But, again, they were caught, and the Premier has recognized that it was not managed well. They didn't really know what it was that they were doing, and so they've taken it back to the drawing board. But the public

knows that very shortly they are going to have to pay this eco fee, a new tax again. Bill 99 is minimal tax relief in comparison to the new eco fees and taxes that the public is going to have to pay.

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Let's take a look at auto insurance rates. They are increasing beyond belief. The new reforms are going to drive up the cost and yet give less in the way of protection to the average driver out there. So again, they're increasing, and we're going to see them increasing. We did, in 2009, by 8.8%. Again, a big increase for families, and when you look at Bill 99, you can see that it doesn't compensate for what families are seeing.

Then we've got our smart meters. What a fiasco they have been. Number one, some of the technology is faulty. Some of the readings are totally inaccurate. People are trying so hard to decrease the utilization of energy, but instead, these smart meters seem to be contributing to increasing family electricity prices and they are driving costs up. Plus, of course, the HST has now been added to electricity prices. That's driving up the cost of electricity. Then, of course, some of the new fees that I referred to—the Green Energy Act—contribute to higher electricity rates. So again, Bill 99 provides minimal relief to families compared to the huge increases they're seeing when it comes to these smart meters, which are causing energy prices to go up.

What else has happened? Well, we've had many fee increases that this government has introduced. We've seen a lot of government services increasing in recent years, such as driver testing. We're seeing increases in fines and penalties for seatbelts, speeding and driving offences. This government has introduced a lot of new costs to the public. Obviously I don't support people breaking the law—they definitely shouldn't do so—but I could say to you that there are a lot of new taxes and a lot of new fees that have been introduced by this government, and this is creating a lot of hardship for families in the province of Ontario.

Bill 99, although I support it and I support anything in order to ensure that our children are involved in activities that will increase their physical activity, because we're seeing an increasing rate of obesity in the province of Ontario, and tied into that obesity is also an increase in diabetes in children—so obviously, we need to be doing what we can in order to encourage and motivate children to become involved in physical activity. But we also have to recognize that not all families can afford the cost, so we have to look at other ways for that physical activity to be increased and new opportunities provided to our children.

I certainly support the involvement of our children in music, in dramatic arts, in dance—in fact, my daughter danced for many years—but I can tell you, when your children become involved in those activities, they're very expensive. There are all sorts of costs that are far beyond the \$500, and unfortunately, a lot of these activities are based on a family's ability to pay in the first place. I certainly support money that would be used so that students get some enrichment or some tutoring.

So I don't disagree with the basic premise of the bill: to help families. However, I would say that it really provides only minimal tax relief when you take a look at the additional tax initiatives that this government has introduced since 2003 when the Premier first said, "I won't raise your taxes." Let's just reiterate what he has done. We had the health tax, which really hit families hard. We've had the hydro increases, which we just have not seen the end of yet. Those tax grabs are going to continue. We've had the \$3-billion HST tax grab. We've had the attempt on the part of this government to introduce the secret eco tax. And most recently, families are seeing that the auto reforms that were introduced are really providing them with higher fees but less coverage. I also mentioned the fact that some of the basic school supplies that formerly were available to students—families are now being asked to pay for those as well.

You know what? Life under the Premier and this Liberal government has increased, particularly this past year. We're hearing about a lot of hardship from our constituents. I think, particularly in the last few months, they're seeing that it has become more and more difficult on a daily basis for them to make ends meet.

We just heard that the deficit is now about \$20 billion, and we know the debt is at a level beyond anything we've ever seen in this province. If you look at Bill 99, which provides some minimal tax relief, and you take a look at the debt and the deficit, we have to remember that that debt and that deficit are tomorrow's taxes for our children and our grandchildren. I think we need to get a handle on the out-of-control spending, the mismanagement, and we need to make sure that we look after the families in the province of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of Emily Goldberg, the page from York Centre. In the members' gallery, we've got father Michael Goldberg, mother Heather Goldberg, grandmother Rene Katzman, grandfather Mel Katzman, grandmother Tillie Goldberg and grandfather Hy Goldberg. Let's give them a welcome.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to welcome some of our guests this morning: Reverend Vincent Thompson, Jack Murphy, Paul Murphy, Pat Persaud, Yukon Persaud, Elaine Murphy and Frank Murphy. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to welcome and introduce a few people to the gallery today: Harold Wilson, president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce; Garry Clark and Susan Warren from the Ontario Prospectors Association; and Scott Jackson of the Ontario Forest

Industries Association. They are here, of course, over the atrocious Bill 191.

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

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome today, in the Speaker's gallery, Bette Jean Crews. Bette Jean is the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is for the Premier. Ontario farmers are facing unfair subsidized competition from abroad, they're facing rising costs of production, and they get hit by new, expensive government rules and regulations every time they turn around.

As you know, the International Plowing Match kicks off next week, and the Ontario PC caucus does not simply show up for the parade. We'll be there talking to farmers all week long.

But sadly, Premier, the priorities of Ontario farm families have been long neglected by the Premier and the McGuinty government. Premier, is it that you stopped understanding the priorities of farmers, that you never understood them in the first place, or do you just find farmers easy to ignore?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I very much look forward to attending the plowing match, as we have every single year. I expect there will be good representation from all the parties, and that's only right because the fact of the matter is that we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the people who live in rural Ontario, particularly our farmers, who work day in and day out to provide us with top-quality, affordable food—some of the most affordable food anywhere on the planet, right here. So I very much look forward to attending the plowing match, and we look forward to having an opportunity to talk to farmers there.

I know that one of the things that my honourable colleagues are going to want to speak to them about is their continuing support—the farm community's, that is—for the HST, because we have, in fact, reduced a number of their costs associated with the cost of farming, and I appreciate that support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here is the difference between Premier McGuinty and the Ontario PCs: Ontario PCs believe in supply management for the commodities that have it and a business risk management program for the other commodities that do not. And, Premier, we would go beyond grains and oilseeds.

Quite frankly, Premier, it has been difficult to tell where you stand on it for simply grains and oilseeds. One day you're for it, then you're against it, then you're for it. You backtrack so often it is difficult to keep track.

Premier, I stand proudly behind farmers and also the MPP from Sarnia–Lambton, Bob Bailey, who has brought forward a private member's bill to offer farmers a tax credit for food bank donations. Instead of supporting Bob Bailey's good idea, you've played political games with his thoughtful and helpful initiative.

Premier, when it comes to Ontario farmers, when did you become so cynical?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate the positive observations of my colleague, but let me just tell you about our reality. These are a number of provisions which we have put into place, none of which were supported by my colleague and his party opposite: There's our new Animal Health Act to better protect against outbreaks like swine flu and to keep our foods safe, there's our tax savings package of about \$25 million of savings for farmers, and there's our \$1.8-billion investment in farm income and stabilization programs—not supported them.

I want to remind you of the record of the Conservative government: They cut \$164 million from the Ministry of Agriculture's budget, they shut down 42 local offices and replaced them with a telephone recording, and they sat idly by as Ontario lost 1,000 farmers every year.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, I come from a riding where agriculture is the number one industry. I'm proud of that. Whether I'm in Binbrook or Fenwick or travelling across our province from Middlesex to Prince Edward county, I'm hearing from farmers across this province that the McGuinty government has simply lost touch with the realities of farmers across our province today. Even if the Premier ever truly understood the concerns of Ontario farm families, he doesn't even seem to try anymore.

In this year's budget speech, you used the words "Samsung" and "Korea" three times as many as you used the word "farmers"—three times more for Samsung and Korea than for Ontario farmers struggling in our province today.

Farm families want to earn a living growing food. The Ontario PCs will provide an environment to do so. Why won't the McGuinty government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Members will please come to order. I found it difficult to hear the question.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm right beside him, and I couldn't hear.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's not helpful, member from Renfrew.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs would like to speak to this.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I must say that I'm absolutely delighted to be able to speak to this.

The leader of the official opposition made mention that he comes from an agricultural riding. Well, that's what

my riding is about, and I can say to you that the members on this side of the House stand proud of our record. We have invested \$1.8 billion in income stabilization for our farmers.

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I will put that up against their record. Their record was nothing—absolutely nothing. So for the Leader of the Opposition to stand in this House and say today that he’s on the side of farmers—my farmers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

It’s not helpful having honourable members egging them on. I certainly hope that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order.

I certainly hope that this enthusiasm that’s demonstrated here in the chamber today, you bring that all to Elgin county next week as we open the plowing match.

New question?

SMART METERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier about his smart meter tax machines: Premier, you have turned the concept of smart meters into tax machines that have become extraordinarily expensive for Ontario families. Measurement Canada says they’re unreliable and giving false readings, and you yourself were forced to admit this week that smart meters are not actually conserving energy or saving families money as you promised. You appear to be backtracking once again and bringing in new rates of power on consumers.

Premier, I ask you: In face of all these shortcomings, in the face of your expensive experiment that is driving up the bills for Ontario families, why won’t you pause this program and fix it so it supports families, helps us conserve energy and doesn’t take another hit at the already tight pocketbooks of hard-working Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very important issue again. My honourable colleague is saying essentially that we need to freeze electricity rates in the province of Ontario. That is not something that we are prepared to do. My honourable colleague and his party did that when they were in government, and they deprived our electricity system of essential investment so that it might be modernized.

We are now picking up where they left off. We’ve been making dramatic investments in the modernization of an electricity system which is now much more reliable, much cleaner and much stronger. There are some costs associated with that. I think we need to be honest about that. Those costs are going to be reflected in our electricity bills. What we need to do, working together, is do as much as we possibly can to control those costs and keep them down as much as we can. But the fact of the matter is, electricity rates in the province of Ontario will be going up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the Ontario PCs have been clear. We are calling on you yet again today to freeze your smart meter tax machines that are attacking the pocketbooks of hard-working families across the province. You have admitted yourself that they are doing nothing to encourage conservation. The cost of the program is \$1 billion and counting. My proposal to freeze this program to get it right is not new. When similar complaints about consumer protection, bad measurements and confusion over smart meters arose in Victoria in Australia, they suspended installation to get it right and protect consumers and encourage conservation.

Premier, why won’t you do the right thing? Follow the example from Australia and freeze your tax meter tax grab in place today.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I’m glad to see that my honourable colleague is looking to some other jurisdictions. I’d also recommend to him BC, Quebec, the US states, the UK, Italy, Sweden, New Zealand and Ireland. Here’s a quote from Prime Minister Cameron’s government in the UK: “The rollout of smart meters will play an important role in Great Britain’s transition to a low-carbon economy,” and it will “help us meet the long-term challenges we face in ensuring an affordable, secure and sustainable energy supply.”

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There’s an intelligent Conservative.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here’s the really good news: There are still some progressive Conservatives on this planet. Too bad they’re not here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here’s the problem, Premier: You have turned your smart meter initiative into an incredible mess. You’ve turned smart meters into nothing more than another Dalton McGuinty tax machine.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member of my speech from yesterday.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, quite frankly, families across this province are leaving the hydro bill on the table for days and days. They don’t want to open that envelope to see what it reveals because hydro rates are spiking across the province. Families that have your smart machines installed are getting hit hard, no matter what they try to do to conserve energy, but the Premier wants to go headlong down this course, no matter its cost and no matter its impact on working families.

Premier, why won’t you do the right thing? Fix this program before putting another tax machine into Ontario homes across the province.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here’s another great quote from today’s Toronto Star, the editorial:

“Yes, hydro rates are going up for everyone, but that is not attributable to smart meters. Rather, rates are rising because the Liberal government is investing billions in new power plants and transmission lines after years of neglect under the preceding Conservative and NDP administrations....”

“Conservatives and New Democrats are both suggesting hydro rates should be frozen. The problem with this suggestion is that the money is still needed for investments in power plants and lines. If the money doesn't come from ratepayers, it will have to come from taxpayers (as it did in the last year of the Conservative government under Ernie Eves).”

We're going to continue to make these massive investments in generation and transmission. We will find ways, working with consumers—including through smart meters—to help them better manage their electricity bill.

SMART METERS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. This government's smart meter scheme is making life more expensive for families, and hydro experts warn that the billing system isn't completely ready. Why, then, is the McGuinty government plowing forward, full steam ahead, with this wrong program?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Fiction is fun, but facts are helpful. I know that my colleague is making reference to the experience of Toronto Hydro ratepayers recently, so we thought we'd better take a look at some of the numbers, just to find out exactly what we're talking about.

There were six billing periods where they compared time-of-use rates using a smart meter with what the bill would have been had they not been using time-of-use rates and a smart meter. With the smart meter, in the first of the six billing periods, there was a 12-cents-per-month decrease. For the next billing period, there was an 88-cents-a-month increase; the next one, \$1.03 more; the next one, 96 cents a month more; the next one, 50 cents a month more; the next one, 20 cents a month more. On average, what we are talking about here is 61 cents more a month. That's what we're talking—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This summer, Hydro One warned Ontario's energy board that IBM's smart meter billing system simply isn't working properly. They said that the system sometimes produces incorrectly high estimates, resulting in incorrect bills that need to be fixed by hand.

“As additional customers are migrated to” time-of-use “pricing, the effort associated with these types of work-arounds increases, as does the potential for customer impact.”

In other words, there's a real risk that customers can be over-billed. Isn't it time to slam the brakes on this scheme?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, with respect to the information that we have and the information that is being used by my honourable colleague, when you take a look at the actual cost of the new time-of-use rates, we're talking about 61 cents a month more, just so that we have that in some perspective.

I must observe as well that it is passing strange that the leader of the NDP, who is generally a champion of

the environment and of collective efforts to conserve electricity and to produce cleaner electricity, now stands against smart meters, when they've been received as an integral component of any intelligent strategy around the world to help ratepayers reduce their electricity usage and clean up our electricity system.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everyone knows quite clearly that the smart meter scheme is not working for Ontario consumers. That's the bottom line.

Now Hydro One is saying they have serious concerns that it's being rushed. I'll read from their letter again: “Hydro One believes that it is premature for the board to set mandatory” time-of-use “dates.” Why is the government plowing ahead with this scheme when there are very, very serious concerns that Ontarians are going to be fleeced?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The fact is, we've been rolling this out for six years now. I wouldn't describe that as a rush. We'll continue working with Hydro One. We'll continue working with our local distribution companies. We'll continue working with ratepayers, and we'll continue working with all Ontarians.

I'm absolutely convinced that among Ontarians there's a very strong consensus on a couple of fronts. One, we've got to continue to modernize our electricity system. We've got to continue to make the investments in new generation and new transmission. At the same time, we have to work together to ensure that homeowners, businesses, schools and hospitals can better manage their electricity bills. Smart meters are an important component of that self-management, so we're going to continue to move ahead with that and move with Ontarians when it comes to doing the right thing for our electricity system and our electricity bills.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier as well. Family budgets are being squeezed and the Premier won't say whether hydro rates will go up again, thanks to his not-so-smart-meter scheme.

Tracey Bissett from Brantford says that she takes care of a husband with mental illness and three children with physical disabilities and can't afford the \$300-a-month hydro bill. She writes, “I need to sleep in the night, not adjust my schedule to accommodate this stupid meter.”

Why can't the Premier tell Ms. Bissett and her family that daytime rates are not going to go up?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As I mentioned a moment ago, using the data itself, on average electricity costs are going up 61 cents more a month when you use time-of-use rates and a smart meter.

I know, again, that there is consensus among Ontarians that we have to make that investment in a dilapidated electricity system. We have to expand our capacity at Niagara Falls. We have to harness more hydroelectric

capacity in northern Ontario. We have to put in place more gas-fired generation. We also believe it's very important to exploit exciting opportunities when it comes to green energy; that's harnessing energy from the wind and the sun. There is a very strong consensus in that regard.

I think there's also a profound understanding that making those kinds of investments costs money, and that will ultimately be reflected in our electricity bills. That's why we'll continue to work together to find ways to manage those bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Hundreds and hundreds of stories of hydro bill shocks are flooding my email box. Vernon Chiang writes this: "My summer bill ... is usually about \$244. Last month, it was a whopping \$408." Sandra King from Hamilton says that after her smart meter was installed, her hydro bill jumped \$200.

How can the Premier justify a program that has already cost more than \$1 billion, some \$1.5 billion, forces hydro bills through the roof and doesn't reduce people's energy costs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague maintains that she has a genuine interest in helping families with some of their costs, but when we put forward a personal income tax cut of \$200 per adult, they voted against that. When we put forward our transition benefit to help families, \$1,000, they voted against that. When we put forward our new sales tax credit of \$1,040 for a family of four, she voted against that. Our northern Ontario energy credit, up to \$200 per family and specifically related to energy—she voted against that.

On the one hand, my colleague stands up in the House and tells us she's very concerned about the impact of electricity costs on families, but every single time we give her and her colleagues an opportunity to vote in favour of an initiative that helps lower costs on the backs of families, she doesn't support that. So I'd ask her to look at herself when it comes to exactly where she stands when helping Ontario families.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A budget that contains \$4.5 billion of corporate tax cuts is not my idea of a good thing, and that's why we voted against it, quite frankly.

Even those people who are taking measures to conserve energy cannot escape rising bills. Beverley Reid from Barrie says, "The bill I just got was \$121 higher ... I don't use my dishwasher and ... do all laundry late at night or on weekends. I even hang up my clothes and don't use the dryer."

Does the Premier agree that for more than \$1 billion, we could have invested perhaps in conservation and kept hydro rates affordable for people like Ms. Reid?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague says she's against a budget that cut taxes \$4.5 billion for businesses. What she failed to note is that they also cut taxes for Ontarians by \$12 billion.

I want to remind my honourable colleague that when they formed the government, they increased electricity

prices 40% in their one term. I want to remind her that they promised 1,800 megawatts of wind power by 2012 in their 2007 platform; by 2011 we will have 2,300 megawatts of wind power. They opposed our Samsung initiative that has brought on a \$7-billion private sector investment, creating 16,000 jobs.

The fact of the matter is, they don't have an energy plan. They're for conservation one day; they're against it another day. They're in favour of smart meters one day; they're against—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Premier. Bob Bailey, MPP for Sarnia-Lambton and proud member of the Ontario PC caucus, has a bill regarding a food bank donation tax credit for farmers up for debate this afternoon. The bill offers some relief through a tax credit when farmers donate unsold produce and food to their local food banks. I anticipate that the McGuinty Liberals will support the bill because they hastily assembled a non-binding resolution that calls for pretty much the same thing as our bill.

Premier, my question is: Why didn't you bring forward government legislation to help farm families with a food bank donation tax credit yourself, like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture requested in the pre-hearings for the last budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I really do appreciate speaking to this. One of the things—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order. The minister has not even had a chance to answer, and you are already heckling her.

Minister?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that I wanted to speak about specifically was the work that has been done by this side of the House on the poverty reduction strategy—and the 25 in 5. There have been a number of motions that have come forward that look at a total strategy. This is one of the proposed tax credits for food donations that have been brought forward by Lou Rinaldi, the member from Northumberland; and the member from Sarnia-Lambton—and there are some fundamental differences.

I do want to thank the farmers, many of whom are donating food today—food processors and farmers who have entered into agreements with food banks. I sincerely want to thank them for all of their donations, and their recognition that local food makes a—

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Back to the Premier: It's a hard time for farm families. While the Premier wants to talk about his HST and eco taxes, their priority is to

manage the loss of \$143 million in farm support. The problems with your smart meters won't help. Maybe the Premier doesn't know this, but livestock won't wait for time of use and farmers don't have the margin to afford your expensive and failing hydro experiments.

The choice facing Ontario's farm families is to decide who is listening to their priorities. The Ontario PC caucus will be at the plowing match for more than just the parade. We have put forward a tax credit for them.

If the McGuinty Liberals truly support farm families, will you agree here and now to pass all stages of Bob Bailey's bill immediately?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment, please. I'd remind the honourable member that my statement from yesterday did not just refer to the leaders of respective parties, but it was for all members of the House. The honourable member Bob Bailey represents the riding of Sarnia-Lambton, as does Lou Rinaldi represent the riding of Northumberland, and I remind—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's why I stopped the clock, and I'm going to offer some leniency as we get ourselves accustomed to using riding names.

Minister?

1100

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to respond again. One of the things that this side of the House has worked very hard on with the coalition is income stabilization for our farmers. I want to congratulate the work of the coalition.

We get that farmers are looking for programs that are bankable, predictable and stable. The tax credit is another part of that. More importantly, what we are working on and what we have provided is \$1.8 billion in income stabilization, and for the longer term, through the HST, the \$25 million in savings and the work that we are doing with the coalition.

We also cannot lose sight of the extension for the grains and oilseeds. This is a program that was designed by the commodity groups. We are committed to working with the commodity groups. We understand that the stabilization of the farm income—

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

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. We have in the galleries members from various communities in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and amongst them is their Grand Chief, Stan Beardy. He's asking me to ask you the following question:

"As the leader of Ontario, you promised a new relationship with Ontario's First Nations people.

"As the leader of Ontario, you promised last fall to the Nishnawbe Aski people that you would not pass the Far North planning act, Bill 191, unless it met with our consent.

"As leader of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, I am telling you that Bill 191 does not meet with our consent.

"As the leader of the Nishnawbe Aski people, I am asking you, the leader of Ontario: Will you keep your promises?"

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to receive the question. I know that there's a tremendous interest in Bill 191 and how to get everyone to find a way to develop the north and do it in a way that's in keeping with our desire to not only ensure that all northerners participate in that growth, including our aboriginal communities, but also in a way that respects our desire to preserve a natural environment for our children.

We've gone through a lengthy consultation process, we have worked very closely with our aboriginal communities, and we now find ourselves at a point where it's necessary for us to move forward. One of the assurances I do want to provide Grand Chief Stan Beardy and all our aboriginal communities is that we will, if requested, put in place an advisory committee comprised one half of representatives of our aboriginal communities so that they can, on an ongoing basis, have continuing influence as we shape this policy to ensure that we get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, nobody buys it. First Nations don't buy it, community leaders in northern Ontario don't buy it and chambers of commerce in northern Ontario don't buy it. But I bring you back to the question that Chief Beardy is asking you, and I'll read his question again:

"As the leader of Ontario, you promised a new relationship with Ontario's First Nations people.

"As the leader of Ontario, you promised last fall to the Nishnawbe Aski people that you would not pass the Far North planning act, Bill 191, unless it met with our consent.

"As leader of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, I am telling you that Bill 191 does not meet with our consent.

"As the leader of the Nishnawbe Aski people, I am asking you, the leader of Ontario: Will you keep your promises?"

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I very much appreciate the question. One of the references in the question itself had something to do with the state of the relationship between our government and our First Nation communities. I'm very proud of the work that we have done together to develop a collaborative relationship, a respectful relationship and a relationship that has resulted in measurable improvements. We have everything from a new ministry exclusively devoted to those concerns of our aboriginal community. We have a new gaming agreement. We have, coming out of the Ipperwash tragedy, a number of recommendations that were put forward, which we have adopted virtually in their entirety. And we have devoted all kinds of new resources in education and health care to enhance quality of life insofar as our aboriginal communities are concerned. We will continue to find a way through the Far North Act and Bill 191—

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

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. My constituents have long been concerned about the issue of narcotics or prescription-based drugs being abused in their communities. They worry that everyday moms, dads and youth can easily fall into this addiction. These drugs are being abused throughout Ontario. Since 1991, oxycodone-containing medications rose by 900%. We have heard that a number of First Nations communities have declared a state of emergency over the abuse of prescription narcotics, particularly oxycodone-containing drugs, or the rising number of narcotic-related deaths.

My constituents would like to know what the government is doing to support the treatment of addictions and substance abuse.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for this question.

There is no question that the abuse of prescription narcotics such as OxyContin and Percocet is increasing in Ontario, and there is no question that the results are absolutely devastating. We simply must take action, and we must take it now.

When it comes to the treatment of addictions, we're currently funding approximately 150 programs across the province for the treatment of substance abuse and gambling. These programs include withdrawal management, community counselling, residential treatment and support services.

Since 2003, we have increased funding for the treatment of substance abuse by 65%. We're taking strong action to save lives and to improve health outcomes for Ontarians by curbing the abuse, addiction and diversion of these very powerful drugs—

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

Mr. Rick Johnson: My constituents will be pleased to hear that this government is working diligently to ensure that individuals who are addicted to drugs have the supports necessary to help them live productive lives. However, my constituents are concerned that not enough is being done to restrict the sale of these narcotics.

The minister mentioned that there is a growing abuse of prescription narcotics and controlled substances, including oxycodone, in this province. Not only is this costing Ontarians in their pocketbooks; it is costing them their lives.

Could the minister please tell this House what the government is doing to ensure that the growing abuse of prescription drugs comes to an end in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This is an issue that is very important for all of us on all sides of the House. That's why yesterday I did respond to one of the recommendations from the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I think all members of that com-

mittee heard first-hand the devastating impact of prescription drug abuse. Our Oakville MPP, Kevin Flynn, did a remarkable job of chairing that committee.

As part of our narcotics strategy, we are proposing that we would develop a database that will track the prescribers, the dispensers and the patients using prescription narcotics. By tracking the use, we would be able to identify the outliers: those physicians who are prescribing far more than they should, those pharmacists that are dispensing more than they—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you've had a really busy summer. Apart from catching your own caucus by surprise, you sold out our civil liberties with the G20 regulation allowing for arbitrary arrests. You sold out northerners and First Nations with your Far North Act. What do your civil liberties-destroying G20 regulation and your economy-destroying Far North Act have in common?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much for the question. Boy, what an interesting question. Although I won't speak to the specific cases that are resulting from the G20, I just want to say this: We have a very good record in the province of Ontario, and have for many, many years, of doing whatever we can do to find that perfect balance between respect for the rights of the individual and respect—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll tell you what you're good at, Chris; it's taxing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I have been patient with the member from Renfrew for 35 minutes of question period, and I will have to warn the honourable member from Renfrew.

Please continue.

1110

Hon. Christopher Bentley: —and respect for the rights of the rest. In the middle of that, in the middle of that very difficult balance, are the police, and frankly, I think the police, day in and day out, demonstrate their commitment to public safety in the province of Ontario. I'll stand with the police and support the great work that they do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier: With the G20 regulation, Premier McGuinty sold out Liberals who believed in the civil liberties section of Trudeau's charter. With the Far North Act, Premier McGuinty sold out Liberals who believed in the aboriginal rights guaranteed by Trudeau's baby. We always said that the Liberals would sell their own child if they had to; now they've shown it to be true.

Premier, what motivates you to backtrack on your principles, and which sections of the Canadian Charter of

Rights and Freedoms will your government abandon next?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We are the government that called the Dudley George inquiry. We're the government that's committed to implement the results of the Dudley George inquiry. We're the government of the new relationship. We're the government of making sure that we have a respectful approach to aboriginal peoples. We are the government that wants to see development in the Far North benefiting the people of the Far North, driven by the people of the Far North—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member knows that if one is dissatisfied with an answer, they have the ability to call for a late show.

Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I am happy to put the record that we have developed over the last seven years over the eight and a half years that preceded it any minute of the day. Line by line, any time, let's put them up.

PEST CONTROL

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Bedbugs are a growing health concern and a nuisance to thousands of Ontarians. For two whole years, Toronto Public Health has been seeking provincial funding to control bedbug outbreaks. Why is this government delaying funding and allowing the current bedbug outbreak to spread?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: It's a very important issue and we have to be very, very serious about this particular issue. We, as a government, and I'm sure all parties, want to do whatever we can to ensure that this problem is eradicated as quickly as possible. I am very proud of our member Mike Colle, who is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

Thank you.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member for Eglinton—Lawrence—your new protocol is an important one, so I apologize for mentioning him by name, but I think he has a great initiative. It is an initiative that we should pay very close attention to, and I look forward to seeing that private member's bill work its way through the system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Meanwhile, bedbugs are proliferating across Ontario and this government is doing nothing. Tenants in Toronto and all over Ontario continue to endure the problem of bedbugs.

One important way to control bedbugs is to stop landlords from renting infested units to unsuspecting tenants. Will the government support landlord licensing as a way of ensuring that landlords keep units bedbug-free?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think the member knows full well that tenants have some rights. If they believe that those rights are being violated because the units aren't being maintained properly, they have recourse to the Landlord and Tenant Board. It is a very important board

that we set up and strengthened. So my advice to those tenants would certainly be, if you have those concerns, to lodge an appeal to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Education. A recent report released by Statistics Canada found that Ontario students are lagging behind the rest of the country with respect to graduation rates.

The Statistics Canada report showed that Ontario's upper secondary graduation rate is 74%. This ranks us eighth when compared to the 12 other provinces and territories in Canada, below the Canadian average of 77% and the OECD average of 81%.

Minister, we often speak of our increasing grad rates, but this report concerns me, my constituents and teachers in my community as it seems to cast a shadow on the success of our students.

Minister, does this report concern you, and how does it relate to the graduation rates that our government announced earlier in the year?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I very much appreciate the question from the honourable member. This government has been focused on student success since coming to office. We were very, very disturbed when we came to office, and only 68% of students in secondary schools were graduating at the time.

We have worked very hard with teachers. I know teachers have engaged students and their families to understand how we can better enable them to be more successful. As a result of the efforts of the folks in the classroom, and particularly the students—who understand why it is important that they graduate, that they need that secondary school diploma to go on and gain post-secondary training, whether at college or university or in an apprenticeship—our graduation rate is now 79%.

We will continue to press for more improvement for our kids. Our kids deserve that effort, and we are committed to that. Our kids have increased their performance in our classrooms.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Minister, we all know that graduation is a necessary step on the road to post-secondary studies and that the task of securing apprenticeships and good jobs is made easier with a high school diploma.

Our government has been very proud of the fact that graduation rates have increased since 2003, but there are still a number of students, some in certain cultural groups, who fail to graduate high school. These students may need an extra push or support to make it to graduation, but it's clear their graduation will benefit the students and, ultimately, the province.

Minister, what is your ministry doing to ensure that our students are getting the support they need to succeed, to graduate and to move on to further studies and the workplace?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government has been very focused on ensuring that students remain in school,

and that was why we brought in our Learning to 18 initiative.

We've worked with schools to ensure that they have the tools. They are now implementing the specialist high-skills majors program. This is a program that shows visitors to our country what is happening in our secondary schools, how it is enabling our young people to be successful.

We also have expanded co-operative education programs. We have dual credit programs where students are able to earn credits for high school credit and also for college credit, thereby incenting them to pursue a post-secondary career in college.

Since coming to government, we now have in the province 52,500 more students graduating from our schools. That's because of the focus of this government and our schools to support students so they can be successful and get that secondary school diploma—

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

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Community Safety: On May 12, I put a question to the former Minister of Community Safety and asked him to stop the OSPCA's euthanasia plan at its Newmarket shelter. At that time, the minister claimed that he had no authority to intervene. In the hours following, 102 animals were unnecessarily killed, and Ontarians were appalled that the best the minister of the day could do was to claim he had no authority to intervene.

Since then, literally thousands of petitions have been signed in support of a resolution before this House that calls on the government to review the powers and authority of the OSPCA with a view to bringing it under the jurisdiction and authority of the provincial government.

I want to know from this minister: Does he believe that the Ontario government, that his ministry, should in fact have oversight of the OSPCA?

1120

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member would remember that our government has clamped down on animal abusers by updating and strengthening Ontario's animal welfare laws for the first time in an entire century. We've established the toughest rules in Canada, including jail and a potential lifetime ownership ban for those who mistreat animals.

We substantially revised and updated the OSPCA Act to provide for more stringent penalties for animal abuse.

As well, we have in fact taken the politics out of animal welfare in Ontario and placed the program in the hands of trained experts, where it belongs.

Our government has developed a system that is consistent with so many other jurisdictions in North America and around the world. We have confidence in our experts, who are trained and have been developed, and

we'll continue to work with our partners to continue to build on the skills of—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: The new Minister of Community Safety should inform himself of exactly how trained those people are. The reason the resolution is before the House is because the reality is that those agents of the OSPCA—who essentially have police authority; they have the authority to lay criminal charges—receive less training than security guards at malls in this province. It's a disgrace.

What is it that the minister needs to know that will convince him that the OSPCA is desperately in need of provincial oversight so that, in fact, the intent of that legislation can be carried out with responsibility? Will the new minister agree to consult with stakeholders to inform himself as to the need of provincial oversight for the OSPCA?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member made reference to a certain situation, and he knows that an independent review is being headed by Dr. Alan Meek, former dean of the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, and retired Justice Patrick LeSage.

But while your leader is here today, I was glad that he was here when you asked this question, and that is because, consistently, the former government and members of the Conservative caucus have said that they do not want to increase bureaucracy. They do not want to expand expenditures into new areas.

In essence, what the member is proposing is that a new bureaucracy be set up in the province of Ontario at a great cost to the people of this province. I know that my friend from Niagara, who gets up and rails against the government any time he thinks this is happening, is not likely going to be in agreement with the implications of the proposal that you have made to this government.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question's to the Premier. Workers at ECP in Brantford have been walking the picket line since August 23, 2008. The factory was bought out four years ago by an American company that demanded major concessions from its workers. The company brought in scabs early on in the process of this dispute, which only prolonged the strike.

When will the McGuinty government bring fairness back to labour relations in this province and support anti-scab legislation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This question gives me an opportunity to thank the member from Brant, who has been working so hard on behalf of his constituents on this matter.

Yes, it's always unfortunate when there is a labour dispute and it causes disruption in the lives of hard-working families, but the member for Brant is doing the right thing. He's reaching out to his constituents. He has come

to me on a number of occasions and explained the impact of the strike on the community. Like the member from Brant, our focus is always to work with the parties, to assist the parties, so they can get a collective agreement done.

Our mediator is in active discussions with the parties at this time. He's pushing them to come back to the table, and the ministry is keeping me informed of the progress that is happening.

On this side of the House, we respect the collective bargaining process, and our record speaks for itself. We've had the best record since stats have been—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier. Today, I'm going to actually join, once again—and I've done it several times already—the 84 striking workers at USW Local 1-500 on their picket line. These strikers have been walking the line for over two years, and not a single one of them has crossed that picket line.

But, you see, Premier, the company also has another plant in Langley, BC. At that plant a labour dispute was settled quickly. Why? Because that province has a law that tells the company, "Sorry, you can't bring in scabs, so you'd just better get yourselves back to the bargaining table and hammer out a collective agreement with your workers."

Why is our Premier here in Ontario siding with the company and telling them, "Scabs are okay"?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I reject that member's approach when it comes to labour relations. Our government understands that fair and stable labour relations are the cornerstone of Ontario's economic success.

I will not take advice from that member or that party when they ripped up hundreds of thousands of collective agreements for our teachers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: On this side of the House, we honour existing contracts. We've seen what the NDP does to labour relations and—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East, your member asked the question. I would like her to be able to hear the answer.

Mr. Paul Miller: There is no answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is the final warning for the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek as well.

New question.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Guelph poverty task force is always looking at ways of improving the lives of seniors, people with disabilities and those living on fixed

incomes. These concerns were only heightened by the global economic slowdown, which affected the lives of millions.

I'm happy to see the progress made on our poverty reduction strategy and our tax reform package, which has resulted in tax cuts for 93% of Ontarians. My constituents are thrilled that Ontario is funding new affordable housing for seniors at St. Joseph's in Guelph.

Can the minister please outline the steps our government is taking to make housing more affordable for those living on low and fixed incomes?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for the question and for being such a tireless advocate for affordable housing in her community and across Ontario.

There's no question that our government is committed to enhancing the lives of those who live on low or fixed incomes in the province of Ontario. The McGuinty government is the first government to be introducing a long-term affordable housing strategy. To date, we have already committed to building and repairing more than 76,000 affordable housing units across the province. In addition to this commitment, our government is also delivering more than 35,000 rent supplements to help make rent more affordable.

Although we, as a government, understand there is more to do, I am happy to say that our government is committed to getting it right and that we will continue to work with our partners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to hear the progress our government is making on affordable housing. While it's unfortunate that past governments didn't see the importance of a long-term housing strategy, I'm relieved to hear that we are moving forward with one to help enhance the lives of those living on low and fixed incomes.

But I do have one more question about our government's commitment to affordable housing. Our latest budget outlines some very important goals, but I noticed that the minister's response didn't indicate new financial commitments for affordable housing in Ontario. Could the minister please outline what recent commitments our government has made to affordable housing?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I am pleased to inform the member that, even through the economic downturn, our government has remained committed to enhancing the lives of those living on low incomes. In 2009, our government entered into an agreement with the federal government to invest heavily in affordable housing. It will see an unprecedented \$1.2 billion invested over a two-year period. Over half the money has already flowed to our municipalities, and construction is going on all across Ontario for affordable housing.

Our commitment will see \$704 million invested in repairing social housing units to make them more energy-efficient and accessible. We will also invest \$540 million in affordable housing program extensions to create new affordable housing units for low-income seniors and the disabled.

We're about building units—

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

1130

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. On Tuesday afternoon, company officials of Abbott Laboratories in Brockville, which employs 157 people, confirmed that those workers will be thrown out of a job when the doors close in the fall of 2012. This plant manufactures nutritional formulas and is one of the oldest and most established companies in that community. Abbott employs 83,000 people around the world, and this plant represents its only formula manufacturing plant in Canada.

Will the minister please tell this House why, at a time when Ontarians should be seeing signs of economic recovery in the province, workers at Abbott Laboratories in Brockville are waiting for the doors to close?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Let me first say how difficult it is for all of us in this House to hear of Abbott closing their facility in that region over the course of the next two years. We're very concerned and, in fact, very surprised. This government has had a long-standing relationship with Abbott. We meet with Abbott executives, here in Canada as well as in Chicago, on a regular basis, so we were surprised that we were not aware that this may come, especially on the heels of significant investment that has been made in this particular facility.

We were on the phone yesterday when the news became public, and we are determined to reach the executives who have been making these decisions to see if there may be anything at all we could share with them that would help in this decision-making process—and we hope that it perhaps isn't a final one.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, you're from eastern Ontario—at least, you used to be. Can you lean over and tell the minister that she can do better?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You don't need to do that. You also need to be speaking through the Chair.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you, I'm told that one of the issues behind the closure of Abbott Laboratories is the inability of this facility to manufacture product in plastic containers. The shutdown announcement comes after the company recently put millions of dollars into environmental compliance issues.

Minister, there's a two-year window until this latest facility joins the list of shuttered plants in Leeds–Grenville. Will you join me, will you work with levels of government and make the commitment to those 157 Abbott workers in Brockville to work with the company and save those jobs? Will you do it today, Minister?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm delighted to see that there is some kind of a reversal going on in that particular party.

Let me tell you this: For the first time in many years, this Ontario government has offered special program-

ming, especially for the pharmaceutical industry, for all kinds of industries that are working on high technologies, including companies like Abbott.

You, sir, through the Speaker, are a member who opposed every single measure that we brought forward in this House to assist companies to be more productive, to be more efficient, to adopt new, clean, green technologies in their facilities. So it is appalling to see that when there are many people who face the uncertainty of jobs in his own community, he would dare to come in this House and be political, while this government has moved forward to assist companies to be more productive—

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

TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said that cellphones and smart phones should be allowed in the classroom.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order. Order.

Member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yesterday the Premier said that cellphones and smart phones should be allowed in the classroom. LOL, Premier. What was the Premier thinking?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I remind the honourable member about the use of props in the chamber. If I had my way, I would be banning Black-Berrys in this chamber.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always delightful to receive a question from our resident thespian, who I know does so always with good humour and with a tremendous amount of goodwill. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. Let me just be very clear with a few statements.

First of all, texting or the use of cellphones to socialize during class is a distraction and it does not belong in a classroom, period. Secondly, we trust teachers, boards and parents to make the right call when it comes to ever-changing technologies. If those technologies can help our students learn, that's a good thing. If they don't, if they're a distraction, then they should not be in the classroom. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: OMG, Speaker. People are outraged by your comments. Here's what they're saying:

“Fancy gadgets don't develop literacy or mathematical skills. They're just more distraction in an already crazy world.”

And: “I work in a college where students can't spell and can't work through a simple math question. If we were to allow phones etc. in class, instructors couldn't get through a lecture without multiple interruptions.”

I know the Premier and I aren't BFFs, but will he retract his statement ASAP?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As I say, always entertaining. But you know, there was a time when slide rules were not permitted inside Ontario classrooms. There was a time when calculators were not permitted inside Ontario classrooms. There was a time, in fact, when laptops were not permitted inside Ontario classrooms.

I think the point I'm making is that technologies are ever-changing and we have a tremendous amount of faith in our parents, teachers, school boards and school administrators to make a call, when they determine that this technology might be of some benefit to students and to learning, to incorporate that as part of a lesson plan. If it's purely distraction, then of course those kinds of things should be kept outside the classroom, and that's where we stand on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LISA LaFLAMME

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate another outstanding member of the Kitchener–Waterloo community: Lisa LaFlamme. Lisa was named the successor to Lloyd Robertson as host of CTV National News in July of this year.

She started her career in her hometown of Kitchener at the CTV affiliate CKCO in 1988 as a copywriter and script assistant. One year later, she was promoted to radio news reporter, and by 1991, Lisa was on television, serving as a reporter and anchor for CKCO News. I remember well being interviewed by her on many occasions.

From that point forward, Lisa's career has been on a constant upward trajectory. More recently, as national affairs correspondent for CTV, she has travelled the world, courageously reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan, and she was embedded with the Canadian military on a 12-day hunt for the Taliban in the extremely dangerous Kandahar region.

Lisa has become a trailblazer for women in Canadian news broadcasting. She has received five Gemini nominations in the best news anchor category and been the recent recipient of an honorary doctor of laws degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. She was also awarded the distinguished Canadian award from the University of Ottawa.

On behalf of all Ontarians, I would like to congratulate Lisa and wish her all the best in her new role as host of CTV National News.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I would like to take a moment to recognize that next Tuesday is World Alz-

heimer's Day. This is an extraordinary burden that has been placed on many countries around the world, but let's just talk for a moment about Canada.

In fact, we have 500,000 people suffering with Alzheimer-related dementia disease. They anticipate that one in three baby boomers will have Alzheimer's. That's attributable, in the next number of years, to 1.1 million people in Canada with this disease, so you're going from \$15 billion to \$159 billion.

Ours is a system that deals with the curative, so once you are ill, we fix you. But I suggest that what we need to do, and what's planned by the Ontario Alzheimer Society in the bill that was presented, is to look at prevention and how we can delay the onset of Alzheimer's or, in fact, prevent it in those who may not get it at all simply by encouraging, for example, physical activity.

What an enormous difference it would make. Actually, it's estimated in total economic burden to be some \$452 billion, considering the caregivers and the challenges that our health care system is facing, not only with those with dementia but with those who are the caregivers for people living with dementia.

We do not have a dementia strategy in this province. The time has come for us to look at this burden that is being placed upon our community—our seniors in particular—and to deal with this in an open, concrete and transparent fashion, which is in fact to put together a comprehensive strategy for Alzheimer's-related dementia in this province. If we don't do this soon, then this burden will become a tsunami for us and we will be trying to play catch-up. So let's not just go to the curative. Yes, we need to deal with what we have, but let's do what we can to prevent, so that many more people can live without dementia and have a good quality of life, as many other Ontarians do.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: As you may know, today is Alzheimer Coffee Break day, a national program to raise funds for the Alzheimer Society. Alzheimer Coffee Break day, now in its 16th year, raised \$1.3 million last year alone. I would also like to take this opportunity to remind the members of this House that World Alzheimer's Day will be recognized next Tuesday.

As we all know, Alzheimer's is a debilitating disease of the brain which robs its victims of memory, clear thought processes, independence, and eventually their lives. According to the Alzheimer Society, a Canadian is newly diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease every five minutes, and this is expected to rise rapidly within the next 10 years.

Clearly, we need a multifaceted approach and strategy in Ontario to deal with the implications of this rapidly growing problem. We don't have a comprehensive strategy here in Ontario as yet, but recently, under the initiative of the member from Etobicoke Centre, who brought forward a private member's bill called the Alzheimer Advisory Council Act, which I was pleased to

co-sponsor, along with the member for Parkdale–High Park, we are hoping that we can move in that direction in Ontario.

We need to be supportive of all of those suffering from Alzheimer's in Ontario. I would particularly like to thank the Alzheimer Society of Ontario for their dedication in supporting those living with Alzheimer's, their families and their caregivers. The support that they give to all of these individuals is quite remarkable and we need to offer them our greatest gratitude and thanks.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I wanted to add my voice to those of my colleagues from Whitby–Oshawa and Etobicoke Centre. It's true, as you heard, that I was one of the co-sponsors of this bill. It's an incredibly important bill. We certainly need a strategy to deal with this coming epidemic. Certainly, we know it's coming. We know the breadth of it, we know the depth of it, we know the cost to individuals and to their families, so we need to act now. We can't wait. We can't afford to wait as a province.

I also want to acknowledge, along with my colleagues, the incredible work that's being done right now in our communities, both by those volunteers in a number of different facilities who are dealing with those who suffer from Alzheimer's, but also by the families. We know what an incredible toll this disease can take on families, usually, and very often on those who are just reaching retirement themselves, who look forward to a happy retirement and instead have to look after an aging parent who is suffering from this disease.

So before we get it—and when you hear those statistics of one in three and you look around this chamber and you know that there are many approaching their senior years here, or are already in them, you know that it's going to affect us. This is a disease that's not only about somebody else; this is a disease that's about us. So again, we call, all of us—it's an all-party effort here—on this government to do something, that they act now rather than later.

KERR STREET MINISTRIES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: In my riding of Oakville, the Kerr Street Ministries helps and gives hope to more than 5,000 citizens by providing holistic support and care through a number of community programs.

It's been a big year for the ministry. In May, they celebrated the grand opening of the long-awaited Dream Centre. It's a facility that was funded through generous contributions from many people in the Oakville community. It's got a gym, computer facilities, a youth lounge and a food bank.

This has also, though, been a year of considerable challenges. Recently, the food bank suffered a summer shortage and the cupboard was nearly bare. Once again, the community rallied, and within one week of the

shortage news coming out, groups like the May Court Club stepped forward and contributed generously to start restocking the shelves.

1310

I paid a recent visit to the Dream Centre. We hosted a community barbecue with support from Everdale Farms in Hillsburgh. The same day I was there, I had the opportunity to celebrate an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant that's going to help the food bank by allowing them to hire staff and purchase equipment to transport donated fresh produce. It will allow the ministry to grow their food bank services.

Today, I'd like to extend my sincere appreciation to Benjamin Ward, to Nathalie, and to all those involved with the Kerr Street Ministries who do incredible work to support some of Oakville's most vulnerable citizens in a time of their greatest need.

LEGION WEEK

Mr. John Yakabuski: September 19 marks the beginning of Legion Week here in Ontario. The Royal Canadian Legion is a non-profit organization assuming the responsibility of maintaining the tradition of remembrance of those who paid the supreme sacrifice by defending our great nation in past and present conflicts so that we, as Canadians, can live in the freedom that we enjoy today.

While the legion continues to support and represent our veterans, it is also an ever-present community organization that does so much to benefit our citizens. Legion members can be found anywhere that communities need help. In my capacity as member of provincial Parliament, I have seen it first-hand. My riding is home to nine branches, and as the son of a veteran, I am proud to be a member.

I'm honoured to have been asked to join members of branch 353 in Eganville this Sunday to kick off their celebrations. Branches in Pembroke, Renfrew, Arnprior, Eganville, Barry's Bay, Deep River, Petawawa, Cobden and Chalk River will all have special events this week. I would encourage all citizens to drop by, talk to the members and see what they've been doing and continue to do in your community, and I remind you that they need your support to continue their good work.

Ironically, after the kick-off at branch 353, I'll be holding a volunteer appreciation event myself. Where else but at the legion?

Our veterans, those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and those who are still with us, deserve our thanks and support. One way we can do that is to ensure that the Royal Canadian Legion continues to be a vital, vibrant and successful hub of our community. Congratulations and thank you, comrades all.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Kuldip Kular: In August this year, I had the privilege of throwing the switch at a new 10-megawatt solar generator installed on the rooftop of a business in

my riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton. This green energy project was made possible by the micro feed-in-tariff program, which is helping to power Ontario's homes and businesses, creating new sources of income and growing green-collar jobs for the future.

The generator installed at Compact Mould by Icarus Power has created new revenue for the business as it feeds energy captured through its solar panels directly into Ontario's grid. Through these panels, the business will also be helping to offset the province's demand for energy during peak hours. It is supporting our commitment to phase out dirty coal-fired generators by 2014, making Ontario a greener, healthier place.

I want to thank Compact Mould and its partner, Icarus Power, for realizing the potential of the microFIT program and for bringing home its benefits to the residents of Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

EDUCATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: A few days ago, our government was pleased to receive the 2009-10 report from the Education Quality and Accountability Office. As you know, our commitment to education in Ontario has been strong right from the start. We are very pleased to see tangible results from our commitment.

When we assumed office, our schools were suffering. There was a dire need to rebuild and revamp the education system, so we began doing just that. Our investment in the education system increased by 40%—\$6 billion more than the Harris-Hudak government. We have more teachers, more staff, more textbooks, more library books, smaller primary class sizes and innovative new programs to help engage students in education.

The results of the EQAO report show that we are on our way to achieving our goals. In 2002-03, only 54% of students were achieving at or above the provincial standard. Recent results indicate that this has risen to 68%.

We recognize that the test scores only indicate one measure of student success. However, we have also been helping students develop solid foundations in reading, writing and math. More students are getting the individual attention needed for success, and more students are graduating from high school.

These successes continue, and I'm pleased to say that our government will continue to work to help the education system improve and get better.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Bob Delaney: Yesterday, Ontario announced that nearly 700 people have returned to school pursuing careers as early childhood educators through Second Career during the past two years.

These future ECEs will help meet the growing demand as Ontario phases in full-day kindergarten over the next five years. The ECEs in a full-day kindergarten classroom work with our teachers to help the students learn, grow and play.

Additionally, ECEs are an instrumental part of the integrated before- and after-school programs that are offered as a part of full-day kindergarten at such schools as Plowman's Park in western Mississauga.

The Second Career program helps unemployed workers learn new skills and retrain for new challenging careers that are in high demand. The program helps with the cost of tuition, books, living expenses and other related academic expenses. Since June 2008, Second Career has helped almost 35,000 laid-off workers.

The implementation of full-day kindergarten helps create new jobs in Ontario, and Second Career helps fill those positions while helping Ontarians find new jobs.

This is just one more way our province helps Ontario families and creates new jobs and a better future for Ontarians today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 191, An Act with respect to land use planning and protection in the Far North/ Projet de loi 191, Loi relative à l'aménagement et à la protection du Grand Nord.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1317 to 1322.

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

All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Arthurs, Wayne | Flynn, Kevin Daniel | Mitchell, Carol |
| Balkissoon, Bas | Fonseca, Peter | Moridi, Reza |
| Bentley, Christopher | Gerretsen, John | Murray, Glen R. |
| Berardinetti, Lorenzo | Jaczek, Helena | Pendergast, Leeanna |
| Best, Margaret | Jeffrey, Linda | Phillips, Gerry |
| Brotten, Laurel C. | Johnson, Rick | Qaadri, Shafiq |
| Brown, Michael A. | Kular, Kuldeep | Rinaldi, Lou |
| Cansfield, Donna H. | Lalonde, Jean-Marc | Sandals, Liz |
| Caplan, David | Leal, Jeff | Sergio, Mario |
| Colle, Mike | Mangat, Amrit | Sorbara, Greg |
| Delaney, Bob | Matthews, Deborah | Sousa, Charles |
| Dhillon, Vic | McMeekin, Ted | Wilkinson, John |
| Dickson, Joe | Meilleur, Madeleine | Zimmer, David |
| Dombrowsky, Leona | Milloy, John | |

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Arnott, Ted | Hampton, Howard | Prue, Michael |
| Bisson, Gilles | Hardeman, Ernie | Sterling, Norman W. |
| Chudleigh, Ted | Klees, Frank | Wilson, Jim |
| Clark, Steve | Kormos, Peter | Witmer, Elizabeth |
| DiNovo, Cheri | Miller, Norm | Yakabuski, John |
| Dunlop, Garfield | Miller, Paul | |
| Elliott, Christine | Munro, Julia | |

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 41; the nays are 19.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 2, 2010, the bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ITALIAN HERITAGE
MONTH ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE MOIS
DU PATRIMOINE ITALIEN

Mr. Sergio moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 103, An Act to proclaim the month of June Italian Heritage Month / Projet de loi 103, Loi proclamant le mois de juin Mois du patrimoine italien.

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. Mario Sergio: The act proclaims the month of June as Italian Heritage Month. It means the province of Ontario recognizes the important contributions immigrants have made in building Ontario's communities and the economic, political, social and cultural achievements of Italian Canadians throughout the province.

Italian Heritage Month is an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about Ontario's rich history.

ACCESS TO PERSONAL HEALTH
INFORMATION ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR L'ACCÈS
AUX RENSEIGNEMENTS PERSONNELS
SUR LA SANTÉ

Mr. Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 104, An Act to amend the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 respecting access to personal health information, security of personal health information and informed consent / Projet de loi 104, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé en ce qui a trait à l'accès aux renseignements personnels sur la santé, à la

sécurité de tels renseignements et au consentement éclairé.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

Those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. David Caplan: The bill amends the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, to provide for the transfer of records from a health information custodian to a successor custodian or the individual to whom the information relates if the individual's relationship with the original information custodian is terminated.

The bill also ensures that no fees are charged for the collection, use or disclosure of personal health information.

The bill amends clause 18(1)(b) of the act to provide that consent of an individual for the collection, use or disclosure of personal health information by a health information custodian must be informed rather than knowledgeable.

It also establishes the requirement for electronic personal health information that is stored on a mobile device or disclosed electronically be stored or disclosed in a secure electronic format.

WORLD WATER DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA JOURNÉE
MONDIALE DE L'EAU

Mr. Kular moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act to proclaim World Water Day in Ontario / Projet de loi 105, Loi proclamant la Journée mondiale de l'eau en Ontario.

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. Kuldip Kular: The bill proclaims March 22 in each year as World Water Day in recognition of the vital importance of water and the increasing demands on global water resources.

1330

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Gerretsen: I have a motion for which I believe there is unanimous consent, and that is to seek unanimous consent with respect to the time requirement relating to a private member's motion.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you. I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business. I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 35 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Frank Klees: I have literally thousands of signatures here relating to the Ontario SPCA. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ... recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care in its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

"Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until" 102 "animals had been killed;

"Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen's Park by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature should call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring these powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm pleased to read this petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care

in its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

"Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until 99 animals had been killed;

"Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen's Park by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature should call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring these powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services."

I agree with this and I'm going to give it to Brandon and affix my signature.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals"—before I go on with it, Mr. Speaker, it was presented to me by Thomas and Evelyn Pye from the great area of Drumbo in the riding of Oxford.

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care in its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

"Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until 99 animals had been killed;

"Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen's Park by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature should call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring these powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and

Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services.”

I will affix my signature to this petition as I wholeheartedly agree with it.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have a petition signed by a number of people from Wawakapewin First Nation, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario proposes to pass Bill 191, the Far North Act; it violates the treaties and disrespects our jurisdiction. It is not a true partnership. It imposes a massive, interconnected protected area over Nishnawbe-Aski Nation ... homelands without any compensation. If Bill 191 passes, we will not recognize it;

“Whereas we, the people of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, have not yet been consulted and accommodated;

“Whereas we, the people of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, have not given free prior and informed consent to Bill 191; all development and protection decisions within NAN territory require the free, prior and informed consent of the people;

“Whereas we, the people of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, will make the final land use decisions; Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect treaty number 9 and treaty number 5 and First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction. We will continue to work on local, community-driven land use planning initiatives based on our jurisdiction; and

“Whereas we call on all interested parties, including environmental organizations and industry, to withdraw their support for Bill 191;

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

“To oppose third reading of Bill 191, the Far North Act, and call on Ontario to withdraw it;

“To engage in honourable consultation with the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191; and

“To obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the First Nations whose homelands and treaty and aboriginal rights are impacted by Bill 191.”

As I indicated, this has been signed by a number of people of Wawakapewin First Nation, and I have affixed my signature to it as well.

RECYCLING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition today from the students of grade 7 at Lisgar Middle School. It reads:

“Whereas the grade 7H students of Lisgar Middle School believe that the current method of recycling used dry cell batteries and other household hazardous waste materials is not successful. We have attempted to create the easiest and most comprehensive method of recycling batteries and other household hazardous materials.... This initiative fits directly into the same frame of reference as the blue box recycling and composting programs, which have encouraged individuals and households to recycle as much as they already do. We implore the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to give this proposed initiative of a household red box recycling program your approval into law;

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

“We, the undersigned, would like to support, enthusiastically, the Recycling Raptors of grade 7H at Lisgar Middle School in their proposal of a household red box recycling program and implore the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass into law such a program, as described in the attached letter outlining the red box recycling initiative, as presented.”

I agree with this, and will sign my signature and send it down to you.

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ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) is a registered charity and private police force autonomously enforcing federal, provincial and municipal animal laws under the provincial animal act without any type of provincial oversight or accountability mechanism in place; and

“Whereas, in 2006, resigned OSPCA director and treasurer Garnet Lasby stated, ‘Government, not the humane society, should be in charge of enforcing laws to protect animals and to prosecute offenders’; and

“Whereas, in 1989, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) formally requested the province remove police powers from the OSPCA; and

“Whereas, in 2006, the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) stated, ‘The number of questions and complaints from the farm community about specific cases and the current enforcement system continues to increase’; and

“Whereas the Animal Care Review Board, a tribunal staffed by volunteers, is the only OSPCA appeals mechanism available outside the court system; and

“Whereas the OSPCA recently received \$1.8 million from the province and is lobbying for additional long-term stable funding;

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

“(1) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that members of the Animal

Care Review Board tribunal are adequately trained in accepted provincial" livestock "practices and have some legal training to rule competently on issues brought before them; and

"(2) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate the resignation of 29 OSPCA directors (including the chair and the treasurer) who in May 2006 urged 'the province to step in and investigate "insane" abuse and animal cruelty charges'; and

"(3) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to appoint an ombudsman to investigate allegations of abuses of police powers against the OSPCA."

I sign my name to this petition and give it to Alex.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition from Muskrat Dam First Nation, and it reads as follows:

"Petition—protect our homelands:

"We oppose Bill 191 and call on Ontario to withdraw it. It violates the treaties and disrespects First Nations' jurisdiction. It is not a true partnership. It imposes a massive, interconnected protected area over the Nishnawbe Aski Nation homelands without any compensation;

"NAN communities will make the final land use decisions. Ontario has obligations to honour and respect treaty number 9 and treaty number 5 and First Nations' inherent jurisdiction. All development and protection decisions within NAN territory require free prior informed consent of NAN First Nations";

Further, "NAN First Nations will continue to work on local, community-driven land use planning initiatives based on NAN jurisdiction;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we call on all interested parties, including environmental organizations and industry, to withdraw their support for Bill 191. Bill 191 fails to uphold the Premier's promise of a new relationship with First Nations and new jobs and economic benefits" for the Far North;

"If Bill 191 passes, NAN will not recognize it. NAN will oppose Bill 191 by any means necessary."

I have signed the petition.

RECYCLING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It is sent by some of the grade 7H students at Lisgar Middle School. I'd especially like to thank Chris Kuzak of Saltmarsh Court and Helen Robertson of Mockingbird Lanes for the petition. While my colleague from Oakville read it, I will briefly excerpt it and then pass it to page Brigid to bring down. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the grade 7H students of Lisgar Middle School believe that the current method of recycling used dry cell batteries and other household hazardous" wastes

is "not successful. We have attempted to create the easiest and most comprehensive method of recycling batteries and other household hazardous materials.... This initiative fits ... the same frame of reference as the blue box recycling" program, which has "encouraged individuals and households to" continue to recycle;

"We, the undersigned ... support, enthusiastically, the Recycling Raptors of grade 7H at Lisgar Middle School in their proposal of a household red box recycling program, and" request "the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass into law such a program...."

I would like very much if page Brigid would carry it for me.

CONDOMINIUMS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "Whereas the current Condominium Act, 1998 does not protect the rights of condominium residents and does not address the changing nature of condominium buildings, development, and communities in Ontario since 1998; and

"Whereas Bill 79 will offer better dispute resolution through the creation of a condominium review board which would assist condo owners in reviewing documentation and resolving disputes faster, more affordably and without going to court; and

"Whereas Bill 79 will introduce standard provisions for declarations to ensure transparency in the purchasing process, enabling prospective owners to read for themselves what they are signing; and

"Whereas Bill 79 will incorporate good-faith disclosure, forcing developers to pay for damages when they fail to disclose information; and

"Whereas Bill 79 will extend home warranty coverage under Tarion to conversion condos; and

"Whereas Bill 79 will mandate that half of Tarion's board be made up of consumer advocates that would set better timelines for conflict resolution; and....

"Whereas Bill 79 will force the updating of sound-proofing standards to better reflect the needs of condo dwellers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support and pass Bill 79, the Condominium Owners Protection Act, 2010."

And Marchese signs this petition.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS AIDE AUX AGRICULTEURS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Revenue, assess the costs and benefits and work towards establishing an Ontario food producer and processor donation

tax credit which would allow for a non-refundable tax credit that could be provided to meat processors, dairy farmers and processors, farm gleaning sites, farmers' markets, fruit and vegetable farmers, and other producers and processors that donate Ontario products to food banks.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Rinaldi moves private member's notice of motion 46. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Before I begin, I want to take the opportunity to thank some folks for supporting my motion today—for example, folks like Lynda Kay, executive director, Northumberland United Way; Rob Bates, a resident of my riding; Bette Jean Crews from the OFA, who I believe was introduced this morning—I'm not sure if she's in the House right now—who is also a resident of my riding; and Anne Burnham from Burnham Family Farm Market.

I have resolutions from some municipalities, the municipalities of Brighton and Quinte West, and Cramahe township; Rob O'Neill, operations manager of Food 4 All Warehouse; and also support from the Ontario Association of Food Banks, to whom I want to give credit for the great report they produced to lobby government to move forward some initiative to allow fresh Ontario food—and, in my case, processed food as well—excess foods, to be distributed to food banks.

One would ask, why a resolution? I know later on today—I want to be up front—there is second reading of another member's private member's bill which I will be supporting as well. But why the resolution? I want to get that on the record right up front.

I believe the member from Sarnia-Lambton has a very interesting private member's bill that tries to address what my resolution is trying to address as well, but I think one needs to be specific about why I brought the resolution forward. The resolution is somewhat broader than the private member's bill. Although I'll be supporting it, this is much broader.

1350

The private member's bill is very restrictive. Once it's in place, to change it would be somewhat cumbersome. When we're dealing with volunteer organizations such as most food banks, where folks are going to donate some of their products for a small tax credit, you don't want to make it cumbersome.

So what my resolution proposes to do is to get the ministry—I named the Ministries of Revenue and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, but I believe, through my discussions with the Ministry of Finance, they'll also be involved once this moves forward. The reason for that—there's no other jurisdiction in Canada that has such a program in place, so we'll really be breaking new ground. Through research we were able to ascertain that there are six jurisdictions, to the best of my knowledge, in the US—the states of Oregon, Colorado, North Carolina, Maryland and Virginia—that have something similar but catering more to their state. If we're going to

do this, we want to make sure that we bring the players around the table to make sure that we get it right.

Just another bit of contrast—like I say, and I'm going to repeat it again, I will be supporting the private member's bill—for example, that piece of legislation, if passed, has some very defined numbers. Are those numbers the right numbers? Should it be more? Should it be less? That's right in the legislation, and we know in this House how cumbersome that is to change.

What I would say to you is that this is sort of ground-breaking. I think, based on what the member from the opposition brought forward and what I'm bringing forward, we do have consensus in this place that we want to do the right thing. We just want to do the right thing.

I just want to add, I was privileged some three years ago now—roughly about three years ago, two and a half years ago—to be part of the poverty reduction team, to come up with a strategy, and now we have legislation in this province. This particular issue came forward a number of times as we discussed with different stakeholders, because sometimes when we're dealing with poverty—first of all, poverty has a number of different faces, but when we're dealing with poverty in large, it's not a matter of increasing the monthly paycheque. It's not a matter of helping them with rent. There are many fronts to the poverty cycle, to the poverty wheel, and this is one of the ways that we can support the poverty reduction strategy that one would have in place.

The other important thing that one needs to consider is that we know Ontario has some first-quality food that the farmers grow in this province; we know that. I represent rural communities, and I talk on a regular basis with some of my local farmers. We know from period to period, depending on world markets, depending on weather conditions, that sometimes their crops are not what they're supposed to be, or, for example, if they have a good crop of tomatoes—and I'm using tomatoes as an example—and the market is not there for whatever reason, I know farmers who have plowed those fields over because, frankly, it costs them more to harvest that crop. It's a lot easier to go with the tractor and plow that crop under.

The other piece that I would say is, that food is very healthy. We know that. In many cases, the people who are in need, who get that service from food banks, normally don't have a lot of access to nutritious food. Normally, fresh food, fresh produce, is the number one key to our well-being.

The other piece when it comes to the farming community, as I mentioned a minute ago, sometimes, through weather conditions, through market conditions, farmers have some challenges with certain sectors. If we had a mechanism in place where those farmers could at least recoup some of their costs—yes, they're not going to make a profit, and we're indebted to them for what they do, but at least it's something that would help them overcome that hardship.

We also know that sometimes we have—I know in my riding I have, and I'm sure in many other jurisdictions in

rural Ontario and even some urban centres, there are some fantastic food processors. In many cases, whether it's a scratched box or a broken case of the processed food, if we can accommodate those folks with a small token through a tax credit, I know for a fact that that will incent them to do even more.

I'd be remiss if I overlooked and did not thank some of the folks within my riding. Farming communities already give. I know that they give, because when I visit some of the food banks in my riding, they have the capability to handle fresh food. They already get some fresh food, and they do that out of the goodness of their heart. Thanks to them.

Processed foods: I know, for example, that in Cobourg we have Weetabix, the cereal manufacturer; they contribute an enormous amount of cereal to food banks. By the way, at Weetabix in Cobourg, the large majority of the grain to process their cereals in Cobourg, which are shipped worldwide, is Ontario grain.

I sense that we have a good understanding within this place that some initiatives such as these need to move forward, but I'd be remiss if I didn't stress the importance of getting it right. Can you imagine if we put out some kind of program, dealing with volunteers and folks who actually want to do good for the community and donate, if we make it too cumbersome, or it doesn't touch every part of what we're trying to accomplish? It would not be too successful.

In winding down what I'm trying to say and what we're trying to do today, I would encourage members to support this resolution. I would encourage members to work within those ministries, and I'm asking in a non-partisan way—this is private member's business—to make sure that we come out with a program, with a system, that is easy to manage, because once again, in many cases we're talking about volunteers.

There is infrastructure in place. I had the opportunity yesterday to meet with the Ontario Association of Food Banks, and they tell me that they're a good part of the way to being able to deliver the service once a program is in place.

I know that I've talked to Bette Jean Crews, the president of the OFA, on a number of occasions. As you know, both of those groups have been advocating in recent years—not just yesterday—that government look at some of these initiatives so that we can roll it out.

I think we do have some general consensus. Once again, I cannot stress enough the fact that we need to get this right. We're not copying any other jurisdiction in Canada because, frankly, there is no other jurisdiction in Canada that provides such a program or such an opportunity. This is win-win-win for everybody who gets involved. Once again, I encourage all members, from all sides, to support this resolution today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to rise today and support the resolution put forward by the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, calling for

an Ontario food producer and processor donation tax credit. In fact, what it does, as he has pointed out, is not simply move forward with it, but call on the government to investigate providing a tax credit which is sufficient to cover their costs to farmers and processors to donate their unsold produce and other excess food to local food banks.

I'm pleased because this bill was introduced after my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton introduced a bill, Bill 78, which is a food bank donation tax credit bill for farmers. It goes further than this bill in that it actually calls upon the government to pass a bill to not just review but to provide a tax credit to farmers who donate their unsold produce and other excess foods to local food banks which is sufficient to cover their costs.

1400

The reason why I hope we can pass this bill plus Bill 78, which was introduced by my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton, is because of the urgent need that we see today. Of course, it is also a request that was made of this government in 2009 by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. It was also included in their pre-budget proposal on January 26, 2010. What we need today is not more review and not more study, because I will refer to the fact that similar programs have been set up elsewhere. What we need is action. There is a desperate need for food.

I had the good fortune this Wednesday, September 15, to meet with the Ontario Association of Food Banks. They were here at Queen's Park. They support my colleague's bill, the bill by the member from Sarnia—Lambton, which would call on the government to provide the tax credit and not go through a lengthy review process. This is why they want it done. They talk about the difficulties in this province, where many households are struggling to put food on the table and they've had to turn to food banks for support. However, the food banks are also struggling because they've seen declining corporate food donations as many food manufacturers are closing their operations in the province of Ontario. They're saying there's urgency involved in creating a financial incentive for farmers.

What did they say? Why should this happen now, immediately, this tax credit to encourage Ontario's food producers to direct surplus food to food banks?

(1) Food bank usage is up 20% in the last year alone, an all-time high for the province.

(2) Food supplies are pressured as food manufacturing and large corporate food donations are declining. Many facilities have closed their doors, including CanGro in St. Davids and Exeter, Quaker, Campbell's etc. Food donation has dropped by one million pounds annually.

(3) A significant amount of consumable food grown in Ontario is disposed of or ploughed back into farmers' fields.

(4) A tax credit would support many local constituencies in need of assistance: local food banks, local farmers and low-income Ontarians.

(5) They tell us that there are many successful state models that provide financial support already. We can

take a look at them. There are 10 US states, for example, and another one considering it. And, of course,

(6) The problem today is that there is no financial benefit for farmers who do make food donations.

Who's going to benefit? I'll just summarize by saying what will happen if we have this tax credit and we move both of these bills forward today, but particularly Bill 78, which means we act now and don't wait for a review: (1) We could increase the supply of nutritious food to low-income families in Ontario; (2) we could reduce the level of agricultural surplus from Ontario farms; and (3) we could support local agriculture by reducing the losses for primary producers.

I encourage you today: Please pass the first bill that was introduced that is supported by the Ontario food bank association, and that is the next bill we're going to debate by the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I want to state at the outset that New Democrats will be supporting this motion, although we have to state at the outset that the superior matter before this House today is the matter that follows this. The bill that follows is detailed. It's been well-thought-out. It doesn't ask for study. It already has the information. What can I say? We believe that this motion is weak but it does no harm. It's dilatory because it is seeking to have study that doesn't need to be done, although that amount of time, provided it's done before next March, really causes no real harm. Provided it's done and in the hands of the finance minister at the time of the next budget, it's not going to delay the process. Therefore, we reluctantly will agree to support this motion.

I say this because this motion comes before us in the absolutely strangest of circumstances. I go back 11 months ago, to this very House, this very room, with many of the same people being in the room on that day. On the 21st of October, I stood in this House and I asked this self-same question to the Minister of Finance. I remember it like it was yesterday. I'd just like to quote some of what was said that day on this very issue.

I asked the question. I quote here from the Hansard of October 21, 2009. It's under the title "Assistance to farmers."

"Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The Ontario Association of Food Banks and Ontario farmers need your help. Even while there are 140,000 children in our province who live in a home without enough food, there is an abundance of fresh, surplus, local food available at Ontario's farms that is ploughed back into the soil or sent out for disposal. Farmers and food banks are asking for a farm tax credit to offset their much-needed donations of fresh food to our poorest families. Minister, will you implement this tax credit in your next budget?"

That was the question, a pretty simple question. What happened after that was no answer at all. You've all been in the House and you've seen no answer at all to many questions. Well, this was one of the worst "no answer at

all" that I have ever witnessed in my nine-plus years in this House. It was a diatribe. It was a whole bunch of stuff: all manners of blame to me and to the NDP why this could not be done; all manners of blame going back to the original sin, as if, I guess, I was responsible for the sins of Adam and Eve, why this could not be done; all manners of blame about the difficulty of putting together a budget; and then, finally, no answer at all.

Of course, I went back to the Minister of Finance, because that wasn't very good. There was so much yelling and cheering on the Liberal side when the Minister of Finance spoke that the Speaker had to stand up and stop the clock because everybody was screaming and cheering what a good answer he just gave. Remember that, Mr. Rinaldi? You were cheering and screaming for him too. And then—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Yes, I'd just remind that we refer to members by riding name or title.

Mr. Michael Prue: The honourable member was cheering too. And so I went back and asked the question again. I gave some more statistics and I asked the question: "The solution is very simple. Are you onboard or are you not onboard? Will this government commit today to implement a tax credit for farmers and food banks so that people can have decent and nutritious food?" Again, I got the same kind of diatribe. I got the same kind of diatribe, saying how bad the NDP was and how we didn't vote for a budget seven years ago and all the stuff that you hear here every day. And of course, I was very frustrated, and I was especially frustrated when all of the government bench erupted in cheers again, because he wasn't answering the question and because, I guess, government members liked that.

I was a little disheartened, but not too disheartened, because the next day I had an opportunity to ask another question on the same issue, and by the strangest, best part of luck, the finance minister was unfortunately not available during that portion of question period, so I got to ask the Premier the same question. I'd like to quote from that too, because that was also exciting. The next day, October 22, 2009, I stood up and asked—and I'm quoting again from Hansard:

1410

"Assistance to farmers

"Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Finance whether the government would consider implementing a tax credit for farmers who donate surplus crops to food banks. For every dollar that the tax credit costs, \$7 of fresh food will make it on to the tables of low-income families—140,000 children. That's an excellent return on investment.

"In his answer yesterday, the Minister of Finance chose to attack me and the NDP rather than comment on this innovative idea. So I am asking the question again, this time to the Premier: Will the government implement a food producer donation tax credit?"

And you could have knocked me down with a feather, because this was the answer that came back from the Honourable Dalton McGuinty:

“Let me just make public the private conversation that the Minister of Finance and I had subsequent to the question being put forward to the minister. We both thought that there may be something to this. The Minister of Finance has in fact undertaken to consider this. It was the first time he had been apprised of this particular possibility.

“I’ll tell you why I am personally drawn to it—and I’m not making any commitments—because some time ago, I had the privilege of putting forward a private member’s bill, a good Samaritan bill, that enabled people in the fast food industry and our grocery stores to make contributions of food, which would otherwise go into the garbage, to our needy. That worked, and it worked well. As I said to the Minister of Finance—he’s undertaken to take a serious look at this, just so you know.”

This was 11 months ago. Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. But I did ask him and I did make the following statement after I said some more things. I thanked the Premier for having a change of heart, and I looked forward to him saying a good deal more in the future in support of this good idea, to which he responded, and I think this needs to be part of the record:

“As I said, I don’t want to exaggerate; neither do I want to diminish the commitment. We are going to take a serious look at this. I’m drawn to it. I like the sound of it. Obviously there is a cost to it, and we need to take a look at that as well.”

Then he goes on to say that he’ll give it very serious consideration.

I say this by way of background. The Minister of Finance pooh-poohed the idea and got cheers from every single person on the government side. When the Premier spoke the next day, he got an equally lusty cheer from every member on the other side, even though he gave a diametrically opposed answer. He got just as many cheers—in fact, I think even a few more cheers—for having said it. And he promised that there was going to be some work done on this. Well, we waited for the work to be done.

I was on the finance committee, as was the honourable member who is presenting this, and he knows, and I know, that this was brought up when we toured the province last winter, January and February. He knows there were people from the food banks advocating this idea. There were people from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture again advocating this idea. And the government members know only too well that there were motions put forward to the Ministry of Finance to implement this.

What happened to all of that—the commitment of the Premier, the commitment of the finance committee, the commitment of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the good works being done by the food banks? Absolutely nothing.

Now we’re being asked, 11 months later, to study it. That’s what this motion says: “Let’s go out and study it now.” Surely to God the ministry had the wherewithal and the commitment of the Premier to study it for the last

11 months. Why are we starting now? I have to ask that question. Was there nobody over there on that side advocating? Even though there were five members of the finance committee, not one person was advocating this, not one person put it forward in caucus? I have to ask that question. You’ll have some rebuttal. Please answer that, because this should not be here today. This should already have been done. And I question: Why was nothing done? If something had been done, there would not be this motion here today.

I also have to question how it ended up here on the order paper today, because this is a really interesting thing. Mr. Bailey, some weeks ago—excuse me, the member from Sarnia–Lambton; the bill is standing in the name of Mr. Bailey here today—put in his notice and said what he was going to bring forward. He is required to do that in plenty of time, and he did that, and everybody knew his bill was coming up next.

In a very rare and strange occurrence, we had a shifting of time frames and we had members changing time frames. We all voted unanimously because we had no idea what the honourable member was going to be bringing forward. In fact, at the time, when the order of precedence was made, it was to be determined. That’s what it said: “to be determined.”

So I have to tell you, I was shocked. This is the first time in the nine years that I have been here that I have seen a “to be determined” bill, which has been changed to accommodate a member or members, actually being used to usurp what was there by another member. I can’t say that there was any other reason. This is not coincidental. This cannot be said to be coincidental, where the time frame has been changed so that this came first.

I do have to say that all of the studies have been done. The Ontario Association of Food Banks has shown how much it will cost each and every year—this year, through 2014, when it maxes out at \$4.5 million. We already know what it’s going to cost. I don’t know what the study is going to do. As I said at the beginning, if it doesn’t cause any harm, if it’s done before March, I’m not going to stand in its way. But this is a very bizarre occurrence this date.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I want to first congratulate my colleague the member for Northumberland–Quinte West for having introduced this resolution. Oui, nous avons un député qui, vraiment, a toujours appuyé et a toujours été solidaire de nos agriculteurs et du secteur rural de l’Ontario.

Today, as my colleague from the NDP just said, it’s the first time for myself too that I see two similar—one resolution and a bill for just about the same issue, but they differ one to the next, because this resolution will not only cover the tax credit to the farmers; it will also honour a tax credit for the suppliers that are giving food to the food banks.

In my area alone, I have 17 food banks spread from Hawkesbury to Alexandria, Riceville, Rockland and Alfred. There are 17 of them, and four farmers’ markets.

But let me tell you that I have to congratulate my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West. This gentleman has been focusing on the agricultural sector ever since he got elected, and as part of that, at the municipal level, he was taking care of the farmers.

We eastern Ontario residents have to say thank you to this gentleman because he is the one, really, who has pushed for the EODF, the eastern Ontario development fund, which has been a real success working with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus. The mayor of Petawawa, Bob Sweet, was the caucus warden at the time for the country of Renfrew. Let me tell you, he succeeded and confirmed that this would be a great help for the development of eastern Ontario.

Food banks and farmers' markets play a very important role in our community.

I'm looking at the present time, talking just before I came here to one of the head people of a food bank. I had to explain to him what was going to happen in this resolution. A tax credit and an income tax receipt are not the same at all. I'm looking at this here, the benefits: The benefit would "provide an incentive for producers and processors to donate with a net financial benefit for the donation of surplus food product from Ontario. At present, an individual or corporation may receive a charitable tax receipt for their food donation, but they will receive no net financial benefit for their donation." That is the big difference between a tax receipt and a tax credit. This is why this resolution is very, very important.

1420

I'm looking just in my area, and some of the places that come to my mind—National Grocers is supplying a lot of food to the food bank. At the present time, some of them are taking tax receipts. It's not a tax credit. I can guarantee that we will see more people in Ontario benefiting from this resolution or from the bill that we'll be debating after this resolution. I have independent grocers, Loblaws, Steinberg, Price Chopper—there are quite a few.

Again, I want to congratulate my colleague for having the initiative to come up with this bill today.

Lorsque nous parlons des marchés alimentaires et des producteurs, actuellement nous connaissons dans l'Est ontarien et dans le sud de l'Ontario plusieurs marchés de producteurs agroalimentaires qui font partie de la communauté. Vraiment, la nourriture souvent leur est donnée par des magasins de « grocery »—magasins d'alimentation.

Aujourd'hui nous voyons, avec cette résolution, que nous pourrions bénéficier davantage. J'attends aussi la discussion avec mon ami de Sarnia–Lambton; on va avoir une bonne discussion sur ce projet de loi. Je crois que, encore une fois, le Parti libéral de l'Ontario appuie fortement les agriculteurs, et avec cette résolution ça va leur démontrer que nous sommes avec les producteurs de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the resolution providing for tax credits for farmers who donate excess produce or other food to Ontario's food banks.

Today, as you know, we have an unusual situation: a resolution followed by a private member's bill on exactly the same topic. I will be supporting both, and I want to thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for bringing forward a resolution that supports the bill introduced by my good friend from Sarnia–Lambton. Clearly, it's a good idea if we are debating it twice and it's brought forward by two different members.

Every year, there are farmers who grow food they can't sell. They would rather have the food eaten than have their hard work and all the good food go to waste, but the reality is that there's a cost to harvesting food and getting it to the food bank. Whether it's labour, equipment or transportation costs, under the current system there are times when farmers simply can't afford the cost of getting the food from the field. Many times, I've seen boxes of cabbages, boxes of apples that were disposed of on the farm because the costs of getting them go to the market were more than the market would pay for that product. Something needs to be done. The idea of providing a tax credit that would compensate farmers adequately to cover those costs and allow them to share that good Ontario food with people in need is simply smart, and it will work.

I'm going to speak a little more to the substance of the idea later, but right now I want to focus on the difference between the resolution and the bill, because frankly I think it's a good example of the difference in approaches of our two parties.

The idea of a tax credit for farmers who donate food to the food bank isn't new. In fact, almost a year ago, the McGuinty government was asked during question period if they would implement it, and they did nothing. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture asked for this tax credit in their submission to last year's budget. Once again, the McGuinty government took no action to help farmers or support the food bank. Now, almost a year later, conveniently, right before they face farmers at the International Plowing Match, the McGuinty government is trying a public relations stunt with this resolution.

This is a non-binding resolution, and it doesn't even call for the implementation of the tax credit. It just asks the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Minister of Revenue to "assess the costs and benefits" of establishing such a tax credit. Compare it to the Conservative approach: The member from Sarnia–Lambton believes that this tax credit will help farmers and food banks, so he researched the technical details on how to implement it, met with the stakeholders to hear what would work best for both farmers and food banks, and then introduced a bill on May 19, almost four months ago. This morning, I asked the Premier if he would take action to give this bill second and third readings today, and still the Liberals have done nothing.

Unfortunately, farmers have come to expect this type of stalling and lack of action from the Liberal govern-

ment. We have seen it most recently in the business risk management program that farmers have been asking for. Bee farmers, pork producers and fruit and vegetable growers in Ontario are all in trouble. Over the last few years, they have been hit with a number of factors at the same time—low commodity prices, high input costs, a high Canadian dollar, cruel legislation and H1N1—and the support programs that are supposed to help them simply aren't working.

They came to the McGuinty government and asked for help. The government told them to work together and come back united on what they needed. Our farm organizations did just that. They formed the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition to speak with one voice, as requested, and the government did the same thing: nothing. The government told them to consult and talk to their grassroots. They did that, and the government has done nothing.

Now, after all that work, the government claims they can't do anything until the federal government joins them. Yet just six weeks ago, they extended exactly the same program for the grain farmers with no federal contribution. Why would the government believe that programs work for grain and oilseeds but not for hog farmers or bee farmers or fruit and vegetable growers?

I don't want to be cynical, but is it possible that the Minister of Agriculture knew that the federal government wasn't going to support this type of program? Is it possible that it was just one more example of delaying and empty words from the McGuinty Liberals? Unfortunately, while I appreciate the subject of the resolution, it seems that what we are debating today is more empty words from the Liberal government.

If the McGuinty government had concerns about the technical aspects of the bill introduced by the member from Sarnia-Lambton, they could have debated it and then made amendments in committee. They could have introduced their own government bill to implement the tax credit. Instead, they chose to use this time to bring forward a resolution that is more about public relations than accomplishing anything for the food banks or the farmers. If there are more organizations that should be included in the bill to make it even more effective, I'm sure that the member from Sarnia-Lambton would welcome that change.

I commend the Liberals for recognizing a good idea when the member from Sarnia-Lambton brought it forward, and I look forward to debating the bill and taking action on this decision very shortly.

I don't want to make it sound like I don't appreciate that the Liberals have given us forewarning that they are going to support the member from Sarnia-Lambton's bill, but I do think it's a rather cynical approach to all of a sudden rush in with this resolution today that has absolutely no impact except that, when we get through today and pass both the resolution and the bill, the Liberals can stand up and say, "Look what we did," when in fact, as I mentioned in that whole list of things, each time it was their turn to do something, what they did was nothing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm more than pleased to join this debate.

Both the motion and the bill are laudable. The difference with the motion that comes from my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West is that it actually includes the food processors. I think that's a plus, not a minus. And while we can stand here and pontificate about all the political whatevers, I'd like to refocus on why this bill is such a good idea and say thank you to the farmers who have in the past given very freely. They may have received a tax credit or a tax receipt, but they have given very freely.

I'll use as an example the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. We feed about 90,000 children every year in this city alone, and so dependence on the food bank is significant, and also on all of these suppliers. The opportunity to provide the children with fresh fruit and milk, for example, is something we should be very concerned about, because it will make a significant difference in how they move forward in terms of being healthy. In fact, if every child in the school boards virtually across this province were to receive eight ounces of milk a day, it would actually contribute to all their nutritional needs that they have in one day—eight ounces of milk—and yet we haven't been able to do that.

1430

We had a very interesting story that occurred with some children in a particular school who, when we sent fresh fruit to them, actually sent the fruit back. This is a very needy school with children who are at risk. We actually did supply a significant number of lunches, dinners or both, and breakfasts, but this fruit kept coming back. Finally, we took the fruit back to the school and said, "This is fresh fruit," and the answer was that the children had never seen an apple; they didn't know how to eat an apple.

So look at the opportunity we have if we can, in fact, reach out to these children, change their dietary habits and encourage them to eat healthy as opposed to eating the junk. It has a huge effect on their ability to learn. It's hard to teach a hungry child. It certainly improves their health in terms of risk for diabetes and other diseases that are childhood diseases. It also takes that message home into the family that a piece of fresh fruit is far better than a bag of potato chips or whatever in terms of a snack.

Here we have, through a very laudable bill and a very great motion, an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children, which is really what we're all about, and their families. Together we can do it. I think this is where we should be focusing our attention, and not focusing on the political rhetoric, because at the end of the day it's a win for the government, it's a win for the farmers, it's a win for the processors, but it really and truly is a win for the children and a win for their families. We all benefit from that by working together.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of this resolution.

Over the years, I've been quite involved with the Kawartha Lakes Food Source in my area, and I know that in many instances—as they are a registered charity, people can donate money to the organization; many people donate food. But they do it out of the goodness of their heart and out of the excesses that they've had. These organizations struggle at many times to get enough food. There are always the food drives that occur around Christmastime, when everybody is in that generous spirit of giving. It's easy to generate food and raise money at that time of the year, but there are other times of the year when it's difficult. Children and families have needs that go on throughout the year. My wife and I were involved in a number of projects to assist with raising the profile of the food bank and the Kawartha Lakes Food Source during June and July, when the needs are still there but often people forget that children are hungry in the summertime too.

This resolution will provide food processors, producers, farmers, another way to assist and provide an incentive for them to assist in supporting the local food banks through the tax credit. A lot of times now you talk to people who have disposed of food at the end of the day because they can't get rid of it, whether it's farmers' markets or processors. I was talking to a processor in my area who deals with goat cheese, goat product and goat whey, and at the end of the day they're trying to find ways to get rid of it, but they end up just disposing of it instead of putting it in a place where it can make a difference.

I think what is different about this resolution is that it says, "Let's work towards having the Ministry of Revenue and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs work towards finding a solution that will work, directing them to get that job done." As opposed to saying, "You must," it says, "Let's find a way to make this work." I think that's a more proactive way of doing it. It will help farmers and food processors. Hopefully, instead of disposing of food at the end of the day, if there's an incentive to receive a tax credit, this will be good for them—anything that will help the farmers today, because I think the farmers are in need.

In my time at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I had the opportunity to visit many farms and speak to the farmers. I think this will be very well received. I know it will be well received by the food banks, and it will provide another source of support for farmers and food manufacturers. I am very much in support of this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Northumberland–Quinte West has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank all the members who took the time and did the research to speak to my resolution today. I think it's fantastic.

I guess I must say up front that I'm somewhat disappointed in the fact—not about the resolution and not

about the private member's bill that's coming next; I think my good friend from Etobicoke Centre alluded to it a little bit, but I want to emphasize it—that we have a good thing here today that we're trying to debate, trying to do, and folks from both the official opposition and the third party wanted to make this into a political situation while we really want to try to help people.

I think I said from the outset that I'm prepared to support, and will support, the private member's bill. It is different. My resolution is different. I believe, and I made it very, very clear at the outset, that the private member's bill is very prescriptive. I think we need to do more. I think we have to do more research. I think we need to get all those folks around the table. That's the big difference. So to take that, when we're both talking about the same thing, and turn it into a political hot potato is very, very—how can I put it? It's not quite the appropriate way to do it in this House. When we talk about private members' business, it's not about politics; it's supposed to be about what we believe is for the good of our ridings or in our province. So I'm disappointed in that part of it, but I look forward—

Interjections.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: That just proves how important this is to them. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That concludes the time allotted for this private member's ballot item. We'll vote on this ballot item in about 100 minutes.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT
(FOOD BANK DONATION TAX CREDIT
FOR FARMERS), 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES IMPÔTS (CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT
AUX AGRICULTEURS POUR DON
À UNE BANQUE ALIMENTAIRE)

Mr. Bailey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to provide a tax credit to farmers for donating to Ontario food banks certain agricultural products they produced / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour prévoir un crédit d'impôt pour les agriculteurs qui font don de certains produits agricoles qu'ils produisent à des banques alimentaires de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member, pursuant to standing order 98, has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Before I begin, I would like to welcome the following people to the Legislative Assembly today, all of whom have been instrumental in bringing Bill 78, the Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers), 2010 to fruition or for lending their support to our efforts.

I would like at this time to welcome—and I will just name them here and they can stand or wave; they are in the Speaker's gallery: Ed Borkowski, Judy Dancause,

Todd Jaques, Nicola Cernik and Basil Alexander, all from the Ontario Association of Food Banks; Bette Jean Crews from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; Captain Brenda Murray from the Salvation Army of Canada; Jamie Reaume from the Holland Marsh Growers' Association; Brenda LeClair from the Chatham-Kent Outreach for Hunger centre; Larry Brigham from the Regional Food Distribution Association in Thunder Bay; and Myles Vanni, who first brought this issue to my attention a year ago, from my riding, from the Inn of the Good Shepherd in Sarnia. I would like to welcome them to the Legislature today.

Mr. Speaker, over the last two years, we Ontarians have found ourselves in the midst of a very difficult period as economic growth stagnated and unemployment increased rapidly across the country. While many of us weathered this storm by limiting our spending on the non-essentials, the unfortunate reality is that many households across Ontario have struggled, and continue to struggle to this day, to put food on their families' tables. In turn, many families have been forced to look to their local food bank for assistance.

1440

In May 2010, I introduced a bill to this assembly entitled the Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers), that, if passed, would provide a significant tax credit to farmers who donate their unsold produce and other excess food. While it might not solve the entire problem, I think it's a common sense solution to a clear need in my community and many communities across Ontario.

I am proposing a simple change that will go a long way to relieve hunger and eliminate waste in our province. Inspired by similar programs in 10 US states, my proposed legislation calls upon the government of Ontario to institute a non-refundable tax credit worth 25% of the wholesale value of donated agricultural products to farmers who choose to donate their excess produce. This bill would also permit those unused tax credits to be carried forward and deducted for up to a five-year period.

The extent of this need was driven home to me last March while I volunteered with Myles Vanni's food bank to serve meals at the Inn of the Good Shepherd in Sarnia. With my own eyes, I saw the need in my community for the role that food banks and soup kitchens provide. Through local churches and other non-profit organizations, these groups provide much-needed front-line help to many individuals and families who are in need through no fault of their own.

The unfortunate fact is that the Ontario Association of Food Banks reports that food bank usage in Ontario has increased by 20% in the last year alone. This means that roughly 375,000 Ontarians, our friend and neighbours, were forced to turn to their local food bank every month in 2009. This is an all-time high for this province, yet perhaps more heart-wrenching than this figure is the fact that roughly 40% of those numbers are children who have to turn to food banks for help.

Unfortunately, as demand has increased, food banks across the province have seen a decrease in donations

from large manufacturers and corporate food donors. In fact, food donations have decreased by more than one million pounds in 2008 alone due to major food processors and food manufacturing plants in communities across the province closing their doors. Most notably, the recession brought about the closure of the Campbell's processing facility in Listowel, CanGro in St. Davids and Exeter, and Quaker in Trenton.

An example: This shortage was felt in a homeless shelter in Ottawa last July. It's my understanding that for the first time in over 20 years, the volunteers at the Shepherds of Good Hope discovered that their cupboards were bare. They just didn't have enough food that day, and they were forced to stop serving lunch to those recipients who were lined up outside.

However, what we often don't consider is the fact that even well-stocked food banks struggle with the ability to provide fresh, healthy food. In fact, the Ontario Association of Food Banks believes that over 72% of Ontarians who turn to food banks for help do not have access to the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables. As we all know, proper nutrition is essential to our well-being, but more importantly, it is essential to the good health of our young people and children, who, as I noted previously, rank among the 40% of those assisted by these local food banks.

We open our hearts and wallets when we donate at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter, but for many food banks a time of significant need occurs from June to August. Rarely do we think of our local food bank during the summer and autumn harvest.

What is most perplexing about this particular issue is the fact that while food banks struggle to provide for those in need, Ontario farmers who are also struggling dispose of or plough back into their fields or send to landfill more than 25 million pounds of fresh, nutritious food each harvest. Why is this? Well, the answer in many instances is that much of the food left behind is considered seconds. While perfectly healthy, tasty and fresh, the produce is often not chosen for sale because of cosmetic reasons, such as size, shape or colour. One is led to ask why those in the farming community don't just donate this food today. Some do, but the unfortunate fact in Ontario today is that in most cases farmers cannot even afford the costs incurred to collect, process and deliver the food to food banks, despite a clear desire and interest to do so. While farmers may wish to donate what remains of what they have grown, we simply cannot expect them to take a financial loss in order to hire the extra hands to glean and gather this excess food. Simply, we have the food; we just can't get it to those in need.

My proposed legislation will provide a financial incentive for producers to donate, that will provide producers, at minimum, with a tax credit which will help to offset some of the costs associated with growing and harvesting fresh produce, while in many cases it will provide producers with a net financial benefit for the donation of those surplus food products. This proposed tax credit would reduce the producers' tax burden, which

in turn should provide a strong incentive to make that donation.

Furthermore, the proposed non-refundable tax credit, worth up to 25% of the wholesale value of donated agricultural products, will provide a high return of investment for the Ontario government. Simply put, it will cost the province very little in lost revenue. In fact, according to statistics gathered by the Ontario Association of Food Banks, it will cost roughly \$750,000 in 2011 for an increase of up to five million tonnes of food. These figures suggest that this simple tax credit could in fact provide a rate of return of \$7 for every dollar donated. Moreover, this number should increase year over year as the program's profile increases.

I believe that my proposed bill presents a concrete solution which will not only assist local food banks but also local farmers and struggling Ontarians who are our friends and neighbours. It will fight two problems in our province: hunger and waste.

It is my hope that this piece of legislation, if passed, will help to neutralize the cost placed on local farmers to collect and donate their excess produce while at the same time providing a significant incentive to do so.

In turn, I would like to thank the outpouring of support that I have received in regard to Bill 73. I would especially like to thank the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Association of Food Banks, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, the Holland Marsh Growers, the Salvation Army, the Daily Bread Food Bank, and many farmers and food banks across the province for their continued support.

I would also like to thank all the members, and especially the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, on the benches opposite, for recognizing the simple wisdom of Bill 78 and also for advancing their resolution. While I agree that a resolution may be a nice gesture, in the end it provides nothing today for Ontario's agricultural community and even less for those Ontarians who struggle to put food on their tables.

In this House today, we have a means to do something concrete and positive for many people across the province who, through no fault of their own, are depending on food banks to feed their families. Thus, I would hope that the members of this House will assist me in moving this piece of legislation through the House to the benefit of Ontario's less fortunate.

As my grandchildren would say, "Papa, this is a no-brainer." According to all figures and statistics, my bill will cost the government very little and provide great benefit to those in need in our province.

In 2009, Ontario farmers were forced to dispose of or plow back into their fields fresh, healthy produce, and at the same time, food banks went wanting across the province, seeing a drop in donations of over a million pounds of food a year and a drastic increase in food bank use.

If passed in 2011, my bill will cost less than \$750,000 in lost revenue but will provide our food banks with over

five million pounds of fresh, nutritious produce. While it may not solve all the problems, it is a simple first step.

It's time to fight hunger with local foods, so today I ask this chamber to act to help curb hunger and waste in our province by passing Bill 78. Let's send it to committee, where, if there are improvements to make by additions or deletions to improve this bill, I'd ask that we advance it today and let's all work for the good of the farmers, the food banks, who have clients that certainly need this food, and all of our own constituents, since I know we have food banks, unfortunately, in every constituency and they're all in need.

I'd like to thank all the members who are here today for this debate, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to start off by saying, from the perspective of the NDP caucus—and my fellow members will be speaking later on this—this is a no-brainer.

I'll tell you, coming from the area I come from in Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, in my riding alone 20% of the people live below the poverty level. We are probably one of the hardest-hit regions in Ontario, next to sections of Toronto, so our food banks are constantly used, constantly crying out for support. This is a perfect solution to some of the problems in our food banks. We have a lot of local farms. We're fortunate in the Hamilton area to have an agricultural base, a metropolis, suburbs. We have the whole gamut of geological conditions that are right for this type of situation.

1450

The member from Sarnia–Lambton is right on with this one. Certainly our whole caucus will be supporting him on this effort, and I can't see how anyone wouldn't. It's certainly going to help a lot of people who are in dire need. I just can't say enough about his efforts in this case. I'm hoping that every person in this Legislature will see the light and do the right thing for the people who really need this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate, and I'll say right from the start that it's my intent, and I think the intent of others, to support the bill that's before us this afternoon. I think it's a very, very good bill.

It's always interesting in the House to note the approach that people bring to private members' time. Some of us think the glass is half full all the time; some of us see it as being half empty and it always being somebody else's fault. I think the idea that's being brought forward here today is one that's a progressive idea. It's a good idea. It's one that's worthy, I think, of all-party support today, and I hope that it does receive that support—as well as the previous resolution.

Hunger is not a new issue, unfortunately, in our society. Farming is not a new issue, either. It has been

around for a long time. Thank God, because it's how we feed ourselves. So for those who say this should have been done a long time ago, they're probably right. The fact is, it wasn't done a long time ago. The fact is, all three parties that are represented today in the Legislature could have done something about this a long time ago and chose not to. That's water under the bridge. Today, you've got a member who has brought forward a good idea. You've got another member who has brought forward a good resolution speaking to the same issue—that by being innovative, by being creative, we can express that desire to help other people in our society. I think that's what brings out the best of this House—when we're able to support motions such as this.

I get teased a little bit about being from Oakville. Everybody thinks we don't have issues in Oakville because it's generally near the top of the income list. Let me tell you that Oakville has as many problems as any other community in this fine province. It has a lot of good things about it—it's a wonderful community to live in—but there are those who are struggling in our community on a daily basis for reasons that just aren't within their own control, and from time to time they need help.

I want to thank the Ontario Association of Food Banks, who are here today. I want to thank them for the report they brought forward in the fall of 2009. They published a report entitled *Fighting Hunger with Local Food: A Proposal to Create an Ontario Food Producer and Processor Donation Tax Credit*. I think it was a wonderful idea. The report pointed out quite rightly that a tax credit could support many local constituencies that are in need of assistance—it can support local food banks, local farmers, processors and low-income Ontarians—and it listed some of the benefits of doing that. It said it would provide an incentive for producers and processors to donate in the first place. It would increase the supply of nutritious food to food banks and to families in Ontario. The resolution that we heard before is based upon this report. We know that, having had a debate on it. By and large, I think the private member's bill that's coming forward is based on the same information. We've had representatives from the Ministry of Finance who have met with the Ontario Association of Food Banks to consider the concept of issuing a tax receipt or a tax credit for the donation of food.

By passing this, were this to come to pass, it's going to provide a much broader base for potential donations to the food bank system that we have here in Ontario. It's going to encourage more people to donate, and it's going to encourage a broader base of donations in the first place.

I'm supportive of any concept that's going to help our food banks, any concept that also is going to help our agricultural industry.

Earlier today during statements, I had the opportunity to speak about Kerr Street Ministries, which has a food bank that supports a large number of people in the Oakville community. As is the case with food banks, from time to time they experience shortages of food. The

shelves were almost bare at Kerr Street Ministries this year. I think had we had this tax credit in place, that may not have been the case.

I know our government certainly has been supportive of food banks in the past. I think all of us from all parties that are represented in the House look forward to the day when food banks are not necessary. However, I think they are a reality, certainly in the short-term time to come and perhaps even further into the future.

I recently held a community barbecue at Kerr Street Ministries, and it was interesting that we got a lot of donations there from Everdale farms to hold that barbecue, which is a farm in the Hillsburgh area. Just last weekend, I had a little bit more time to spend down the street at the Kerr Village Farmers Market. They've just received an OMIF grant and they're developing a new and unique concept. They're going to contact Ontario farmers within a hundred miles and invite them to participate at the market and, at the end of the day, any food that is not sold at the market will be turned over to the food bank. I think that's a wonderful idea for two organizations that are almost neighbours.

I think it really is an opportunity for us in the House today to support what is a very good idea that's being brought forward. There are those who, as I said previously, will take a different outlook on this and use it, maybe, to gain political points. Even though the person who has brought this forward is an honourable member from a different party, I have no problem supporting this. I think it's a wonderful idea. I thank the member for bringing it forward. It's motions like this that I think bring out the best in this House, as I said earlier. It's a chance to, perhaps, forget about the past, maybe forget about the things we could have done or we should have done, and it's a chance to move forward based on recommendations that are being brought forward by the Ontario Association of Food Banks.

So, to those progressive members who are going to vote for this, I think that they deserve our admiration today in the House and I think the people who are providing this service deserve that admiration, as well as the person who has brought forward the motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to support Bill 78, Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers), introduced by my colleague the member from Sarnia-Lambton. We've had considerable debate today about the need for a tax credit for farmers, and I'm pleased to see the support that this idea has on both sides of the House.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of meeting with the members from the Ontario Association of Food Banks. They had two messages. They reiterated the growing need in Ontario's food banks and talked about the importance of this bill. The statistics they provided are a cause for concern. Food bank usage in Ontario has increased by 20% in the last year alone. Over 375,000 Ontarians are forced to turn to food banks every month,

an all-time high for the province. They believe that this bill will make a difference, that it will help farmers and help food banks across Ontario to feed Ontarians in need and it will help ensure that people who are forced to use food banks have access to good, healthy and fresh food.

In a letter supporting this bill, the Ontario Association of Food Banks said, "Food banks and families across Ontario have been hit hard by the economic downturn. Despite reports of an economic turnaround, the situation is very difficult on the front line. We continue to witness significant increases in the number of neighbours turning to community food banks for support, and our ability to respond to the tremendous need that exists is constrained by pressures on our food supply. We certainly believe in the need to ensure economic security through bold and progressive social and economic policy, but there is a need to respond to the immediate need that exists in towns and city across the province."

At the same time, we know every year there are farmers who are simply unable to find a market for some of the food that they grow. It is estimated that each year over 25 million pounds of fresh, nutritious food is disposed of or ploughed back into farmers' fields in Ontario. We know that Ontario farmers are proud of the food that they grow, and I want to commend and thank the farmers who are already making donations to their local food bank. However, unfortunately, there are many more farmers across Ontario who would be happy to donate excess crops to the food bank but simply can't absorb the cost of harvesting and transportation. It is cheaper to plough the food under than to pay for the labour and machinery to harvest it and truck it to the food bank.

This tax credit is a simple solution that makes sense and will help farmers and people in need. I want to commend the member from Sarnia-Lambton for introducing this bill and for all the work that he has done to promote this issue. I know he has been working hard and has earned the support of the food bank association, as well as several farm organizations. I'm pleased that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture is supporting this bill and that Bette Jean Crews is sitting up in the gallery here today to demonstrate that support in person on behalf of the farmers of Ontario. There are a number of other agricultural organizations supporting this bill, including the fruit and vegetable growers, who are also represented in the gallery today. The Holland Marsh Growers' Association is also here.

1500

About two years ago, I had the opportunity to attend an agriculture round table in Sarnia-Lambton that the member organized. I know him, from that meeting as well as his work here at Queen's Park, as a strong advocate for the farmers in his riding and for all his constituents.

We know that this government needs to take a number of steps to support our farmers, including implementing the provincial portion of the business risk management program based on the cost of production and cutting red

tape. The McGuinty government has missed many opportunities to do the right thing to support our farmers. This morning, the Premier missed another one when he failed to immediately move second and third reading for this bill.

I hope the members on both sides of the House will take this opportunity to demonstrate their support for farmers by supporting this bill and that, for the government, this is the first step in delivering the support Ontario farmers desperately need.

Again, I want to commend the member from Sarnia-Lambton for bringing this great bill forward. I'm happy to support it and look forward to it going through second reading today, committee after this, and hopefully third reading and the law of the land before it's completed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, I'll be supporting this motion.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Exactly, Monsieur Bailey from Sarnia-Lambton.

This is a good debate to have. This is a good bill to be debating and supporting. But I want to say, if I can, if I can be permitted to talk about issues connected to poverty, issues as they relate to the food banks, why we have a United Way at all and why it is we are shifting our attention to charities.

If you notice, we have a growing number of people who are going to food banks. There's a steady increase over the years. We used to think that the use of food banks was something that happened in recessions or deep depressions. When it happens in good times, you say, "What's going on?" There is an increase of food bank use in good economic times, which we have seen, without mentioning any previous regime, and which we've seen over the years. No one says, "What is happening?"

You see the fact that more and more people are contributing to the United Way when it used to be \$50 million, and then they increase the pressure on people to give so it goes to \$60 million, and then they increase the pressure to give and it goes to \$70 million. Every year it goes up: \$80 million and \$90 million. Now they're at \$120 million.

We're urging people to be charitable, give out of their own pocket. We give to charity so that the United Way can give to people in need. What's happening? We are shifting from government obligations to charities. We're going to churches and we're going to individuals, saying, "Please give a little more because poor people need it." And when you ask the people in government to do a little more for those in need, we struggle to get something out of them. We're moving from government obligations to charitable donations. We're making people feel guilty for not giving.

Then we have a government that is happily saying, "We gave \$1.2 billion in income tax cuts," and we have a deficit of \$20 billion. We don't have any money to give, but we're giving it away in the form of income tax cuts,

giving it away to people like me, and others who are wealthier than me, who don't need a tax break. And we have a deficit and we have growing poverty in this province.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek says 20% of his community is below the poverty line. That's huge. What are we as governments doing? What does government say when a growing number of middle-class people are being squeezed out of that class and shrinking into the working poor? Because that's what's happening in our province; that's what's happening worldwide. The middle class is losing and disappearing slowly, losing those benefits it had, losing those good unionized jobs it had. And they are in jeopardy, often, of being a pay-cheque away from lining up at the food banks.

We're not really having the discussion we should be having. I support your bill, but the discussion is: Why do we have so much poverty? Why do we have so much unemployment when for the last 15, 20 years, we're reducing the taxes of corporations who say that by doing so we're going to create more and more work? And yet, we have high unemployment. We've been giving tax breaks to corporations since I can remember, but for the last 15 years, both Liberal governments federally and federal Conservatives are just giving our money away, with a promise that by so doing we create work—and we don't create work. We are just giving our money away to them. The provincial government is giving \$5 billion to the corporations, no strings attached—God bless—and we have a \$20-billion deficit.

Then, when we have to do something as useful as this, that says, “Let's give a tax credit to farmers who otherwise might not be able to get their product to the market to be able to sell it,” to do something with it, and therefore it goes to waste—we put that good stuff into the earth so that we can regenerate good food for the next season, but it's food that's lost, that could be used by 140,000 children who go hungry every day.

For me, it's an easy bill to support. I wish we could discuss the other issue, the causes of poverty, why we have it. I wish we could discuss the fact that governments are giving away their obligations and their responsibilities and passing them on to the church and other volunteer organizations that do work for free, for nothing. I wish we could debate that. But we're not. We go around the fringes. That's what we do. But until we can have that debate, we have to deal with these bills. Michael Prue from Beaches–East York raised it a year ago. I thought it was a good idea then. I think it's a good idea today. I think we could move beyond studying, but if we have to study it, okay, let's study it. That's okay. But I think we can move beyond that easily and quickly.

I hope today we have enough members from all three political parties to support the motion from the member from Sarnia–Lambton and move the agenda of how we deal with poverty along, and in the process, help the food bank who are doing great work and help the farmers sustain the lives that they have and making our life a little better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on private members' business Bill 78, Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers).

This is an interesting initiative by the member from Sarnia–Lambton, one that I can support. I would say I can support initiatives in principles that support our food-producing sector and those who have made great contributions to Ontario, and our food banks that provide the assistance for the less fortunate in our society.

This bill is similar to the earlier motion from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West except for two significant differences; that is, number one, recognizing that food processors are an important part of the food-producing sector in Ontario. This sector is not included in the bill, but was included in the motion. His motion also recommends that the Ministry of Revenue “assess the costs and benefits and work towards establishing an Ontario food producer and processor donation tax credit which would allow for a non-refundable tax credit that could be provided to meat processors, dairy farmers and” other “processors, farm gleanings sites, farmers' markets, fruit and vegetable farmers” that donate food to Ontario food banks.

The significant point to be made here is to assess the cost and benefits of this initiative, a very important factor in this particular bill. Can the government afford the lost revenue in today's economic situation of deficit budgets? Can the government replace the lost revenue through other initiatives, now and in the future? Can the government estimate what the real and ongoing costs of this initiative would be? Do we have all the controls and procedures in place? Who gets the credit? When do they get it? I've heard from food banks of food being delivered that expires within a couple of days, and the bank does not have the opportunity to distribute it on time.

1510

I have these little concerns. I support the initiative, and I support my colleague who says we should review and assess it.

My point here is, as a government, we should be making informed decisions with all the details after we have looked at it thoroughly, especially in today's economy.

My colleague from Sarnia–Lambton knows that the bill he's bringing forward has a cost to the government and the taxpayers of Ontario and would require our finance people to take a good look at it. We must be responsible and we must be accountable to our taxpayers for the decisions we make here on their behalf on a daily basis.

No discredit to my friend. He may be doing this because he believes it's the right thing to do on behalf of his constituents, and I give him credit for that because that's what we're here for on a daily basis.

Our government has provided great support to Ontario's food industry over the years, and I just want to raise a couple of them that I know of myself. The minister mentioned just recently in the House that we've invested \$27 million in broadband services in rural Ontario communities to help the farmers and the people who live in rural Ontario.

We've invested over \$2 billion in the food processing sector; this has created and protected some of the jobs that exist in that sector.

We have provided \$1.8 billion in assistance to farmers to stabilize their income over the years.

We have provided \$98 million for 275 rural economic development projects over the years.

This government has been on the forefront of helping the farming industry. And as a member who sat on the poverty committee, I can tell you that we've considered everything to help the poor people in Ontario, the vulnerable people in Ontario—those who are in need.

If you look at the government's Open Ontario plan, it includes a Buy Local strategy, with marketing campaigns for "Good Things Grow in Ontario" and the expansion of the Foodland Ontario program.

I would say that I support this initiative; I support my colleague for what he's doing, but I do have some concerns that the government must do what is right. We must review this particular issue, and when we decide to do it—which I would hope that we do, because I truly believe it's something that will benefit all—it will benefit the farm industry, it will benefit the food banks and it will benefit those people who need assistance in our community. But we must do what is right on behalf of the taxpaying public.

Again, I'd say I support considering tax credits, as this bill moves through the system, but clearly it requires some work. I truly believe that my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West's motion has more to it, and as a responsible government, we should consider his motion in the same light as the bill. Hopefully, as we consider that particular motion or we consider this bill, the ministry would bring something forward so that we could do what's right for Ontario and find that balanced approach.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to join the discussion on Bill 78 this afternoon, a bill brought forward by my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton. I'm very pleased to support his bill.

As I said, speaking to some folks earlier, this bill is a win-win-win. The farmers will receive a tax credit for something that they can donate that otherwise may have gone to waste; the food banks will receive much-needed donations to their establishments in a time of increasing demand; and of course, most importantly, those people who desperately need that food from those food banks will be receiving more as a result of this.

It's interesting that the resolution that was brought forth earlier today—and the member for Northumber-

land–Quinte West, while saying he was going to support this bill, also took the time to point out what he thought were the weaknesses and the failures of the bill. Well, we've got to get a couple of things straight. First of all, this issue was brought up to the government in the pre-budget hearings. This is not new. It has been going on for years, but certainly this year it was brought up before the hearings. My colleague from Sarnia–Lambton consulted with stakeholders before bringing forth his bill.

If the government or the members on the opposite side believe there are ways that this bill can be improved, they can do that through amendment. We can certainly incorporate food processors and include them in this bill through the amendment process. But they're looking for reasons to be negative about the bill. My good friend from Scarborough–Rouge River was going through the financial accounting minutiae, which is really not the important part of this bill. We have people who can figure that out. And I've got to believe that the folks at the food bank are going to look after all of the problems that this bill creates for them, because the benefits that this bill will accrue to them will be much greater than any problems that this bill can create for them. I have infinite faith that they will make this work. So don't be looking for reasons to say no. We should be looking for reasons to say yes.

I know my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West chastised members on this side because we were being critical of a good idea. We're not being critical of a good idea but being critical of the way that the government side brought this forward. There was no indication prior to this week that the member from Northumberland–Quinte West even had a—there was nothing even on the order paper.

We have them talking about a resolution versus a bill. People should also be aware that regardless of the value or the good intentions of the member's resolution, it has no power whatsoever to bind this Legislature or the government to act. On the other hand, a bill such as the one presented by my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton does compel this body to act and will compel the government to actually act, should that bill be passed.

So I would urge all members to do the right thing: get this bill passed, get it to committee. The member has indicated without any reservation that he will work with all members on all sides of this House to deal with the amendments that are necessary to make this the best possible piece of legislation; to benefit our farmers, our food bank operators and the people who desperately need the help of those food banks; to help them all in the best way possible. Let's get this through the process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to rise and to speak to this bill, which we're going to support. As my colleague from Trinity–Spadina said, it's a no-brainer. Commendations, in fact, to the Progressive Conservative Party for doing the work needed to bring it forward.

It is a very sad day, I think, when partisanship in this place trumps morality and ethicality. I think that Ontar-

ians have very little time for the kind of partisanship that gets played out here, particularly when we're dealing with a calamity.

We're dealing with a national disaster—homelessness in Ontario. We're dealing with a national disaster: poverty. We haven't seen poverty rates like this in the province of Ontario since the 1930s. Let's face it, that's what we're involved in now. And with all due respect to my friends across the aisle, what they're doing isn't working. Poverty rates are not coming down; in fact, they're going up. One in six children in this province lives in poverty. That's the reality. Anything we can do as a body, whoever brings it forward, we should do.

I don't understand why the government can't simply act on this. It's sad not to see more cabinet ministers here. It's sad that 11 months ago, our member from Beaches–East York raised this and now we're having this discussion 11 months later. How many children have gone to bed hungry in that 11-month period? How many have gone to bed hungry who could have been fed had this bill been passed 11 months ago? Friends, we're talking about children here. We're talking about families.

1520

My friend from Trinity–Spadina raised the issue of the discussion about poverty, period. Yes, we could go into it. Yes, there are great examples of other places that do it better. I'm thinking of our wonderful friends who are in attendance here from faith communities, who do so much. The Salvation Army is a beacon for all of those who need help. We have to help them. That's our job here. We have to help them do their job. This is a very simple, cost-effective way of doing that.

We don't need to study it anymore. Please. With all due respect, the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, this is in place in other jurisdictions. It's already working in other jurisdictions, in states. It's working already. We don't need to study it. Another child will go hungry every minute that we study it. What we need to do is to put it into place—this, among many other things, we need to put into place.

Again, to go back to my friend from Trinity–Spadina, the question of poverty is not just a question. We're talking about lives here. We're talking about real people who go to bed really hungry every night. I grew up in a Bill Davis Ontario—he looks like a socialist by comparison to what we're getting these last few years from this government—where you could actually live on welfare and pay rent and feed your children.

All we're asking for here is a very small step—not to build the 20,000 units of housing the government promised—hey, not even mentioning that—not to talk about real programs to really attack what we call poverty in this province, but just one small step. But it's a small step that will actually feed children.

I know we're going to vote on this, but it's not enough. We need to see from the other side of the aisle a government in action that brings this forward as law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of my colleague and seatmate, Bob Bailey, the member for Sarnia–Lambton, and his private member's bill.

Bill 78, the food bank donation tax credit for farmers, is an important and long-overdue piece of legislation. I know it will help three vital components of my riding of Leeds–Grenville: farmers, food bank organizers and volunteers, and, of course, families in need.

I know the farmers of Leeds–Grenville are already a generous group and give so much to the communities they call home. This bill will recognize that with a much-needed tax credit, and I thank Bob Bailey, the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

I'm going to talk about some of the people in my riding. The president of the Grenville Federation of Agriculture, Adrian Wynands of ChrisAnn Farms in North Augusta and Jolanda Farms in Roebuck, says the bill “is a great thing for farmers, and food banks need all the help they can get.”

Ruth Vogel of the Leeds County Federation of Agriculture is another enthusiastic supporter of Bill 78. Here's what she had to say: “It's a win-win situation for both farmers and food banks. It's a great idea.”

Looking at the impact of Mr. Bailey's bill—the member for Sarnia–Lambton—we can understand that poverty and hunger aren't just big-city problems. The steady erosion of family budgets, thanks to this government's decision on the HST, electricity rates and more, are forcing families to make tough choices. At the end of the day, it's often the grocery list that is being sacrificed, and moms and dads are turning to food banks in record numbers.

I'd now like to talk about some of the groups that deliver care and compassion in my riding: Operation Harvest Sharing in Brockville; Food for All in Prescott, Cardinal and Spencerville; the Athens Area Ministerial Food Bank; the Roll Aid Centre Food Bank in Seeley's Bay; the Gananoque Food Bank; the Kemptville Salvation Army food bank; and food banks in Delta, Elgin, Portland, at the Merrickville community health centre, the Westport United Church and St. Ann's parish in Merrickville–Wolford.

This Saturday, I'll be in Prescott for the Food for All Food Bank's Bottom Line Food Challenge, founded in 2002. Food for All officials Shorey Bowen and Bonnie Gommert say that the food bank has already had a steady increase in usage. It serves South Grenville, and helped 1,128 individuals in 2009. I might add that 35% of those are under the age of 18. They also provide 23 infants with formula every month.

In Brockville, the story is similar: Operation Harvest Sharing, with their co-chair, Myra Garvin, which serves 430 families every month. Between January and August of this year, it's up more than 7%.

In Seeley's Bay, you can find people like volunteer administrator Donna Robinson and the ROLL Aid Centre Food Bank. It was formed in 1998 because of the ice storm. They serve 115 people each month.

In Westport, Bev Heyman operates their operation under the local United Church. In four years, their group has served 40 families in Westport and Newboro. About 25% of those people are on a fixed income.

I'm urging everyone to support my good friend Bob Bailey's bill. Let's give farmers the tax relief they deserve and food banks and families the help they desperately need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Sarnia-Lambton has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a privilege to rise today. I'd like to commend all of the speakers who were here today and who spoke, especially the members from Northumberland-Quinte West, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Oakville, Oxford, Trinity-Spadina, Scarborough-Rouge River, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and, of course, my seatmate here from Leeds-Grenville. It's a privilege to be able to respond to the debate that was here today.

It's important, I think. If we did nothing else for the next 90 days—someone did a calculation that we're going to sit for maybe 90 days before the House can rise—I think this could be one of the most important things we could do for these children that the member from Toronto just spoke about a number of minutes ago. I think it's very important that we try and move this forward, bring this debate and forget about who could have done what and when.

Let's take it to committee. I agree with the member from Northumberland-Quinte West and other members who spoke here: Let's take it to committee, make improvements to it. If there are some things we have to take out of it to make it work, let's get it there. There's been enough debate about it. Members have known about this. Obviously, it's come up at finance committee over the years. I would say, let's move it forward. There's obviously a need out there. Like the member from Trinity-Spadina said, these children are often going to bed at night hungry, and being a grandfather and a father myself, I can't imagine that.

I would encourage all the members to do everything we can to do this. Let's move this bill forward, get it into committee after third reading, and do our best to implement the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. For those in the galleries and those watching at home, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 50 minutes.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT
DES VOIES PUBLIQUES

ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN

Mr. Norm Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act / Projet de loi 100, Loi

modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to debate this private member's bill, Bill 100. Let me briefly begin by just explaining what the bill does.

Essentially, when a provincial secondary highway, as designated in regulation by the bill, is being rebuilt or repaved, when that happens on a designated highway, then a minimum of one metre of the shoulder would be paved when that highway is being rebuilt. As well, when that paved shoulder is added, there would also be signs that would be added that would say "Share the road" for that new section of highway that has paved shoulders. That's briefly what the bill would be doing.

I'm going to go through and talk a bit about why this private member's bill—I think there are lots of good reasons—and also talk a bit about the benefits of this private member's bill.

I would say it comes as much from living in a rural riding that depends on tourism and has lots of secondary provincial highways, where some have parts with paved shoulders and some have district roads that have paved shoulders. I'd simply tell you that where those paved shoulders exist, they are used primarily by cyclists, but also by other people walking or jogging. I would also say that over the last nine years, going back to when I had my nomination meeting—I know that in my nomination speech I talked about adding more trails as a benefit to the tourism economy in Parry Sound-Muskoka, and that included paving shoulders.

1530

Also, where specific highways have been getting rebuilt in Parry Sound-Muskoka, I've had constituents write to me, and in every case where that has happened, I have written to the Ministry of Transportation encouraging them to pave a section of the shoulder on the highway that was being rebuilt. As a matter of fact, two years ago, in 2008, they were rebuilding Highway 118 east, which happens to head out to where I live, in Vankoughnet. Most of that section of highway does have a paved shoulder, and they were rebuilding about a seven-kilometre section.

I was written to and phoned by Mr. Tim Rainey asking if I could contact the ministry to encourage them to do the little section that was being rebuilt. I got a letter back from the ministry essentially giving a bureaucratic reason why they couldn't do it: "While I appreciate your request, the ministry is currently focusing its resources on rehabilitating aging pavements and bridges"—basically, "Sorry, we can't do it." They actually did pave a bit of the shoulder anyway, so it was better than the old situation where there was no paved shoulder. So I have had a negative response. I've also just suggested the policy to the ministry and had negative responses.

I would say that recently—in fact, today—I received a response to another request from the riding, based on

Highway 518, and it's more encouraging. They state in this letter on Highway 518, which I literally received today from the new minister: "All existing fully paved shoulder locations will be reinstated and additional locations are being considered in the design where warranted for maintenance purposes." So that's an encouraging change. I would also note that recently the government did agree to pave a section of Highway 6; I think it's on Manitoulin Island.

So I'm pleased to see that trend, because I've had many years of absolute rejection, and now there is a slight improvement. They aren't saying it's for cyclists; they're saying it's for maintenance purposes. Frankly, I don't care what they say it's for, as long as there's a minimum of a metre of paved shoulder on these secondary highways.

The case right now is that people are cycling on the highways with no paved shoulders. Frankly, when you do so, you're taking your life in your hands. In fact, when I did a press conference a week ago to promote this, Eleanor McMahon, whose husband, Greg Stobbart, an OPP sergeant who was killed in 2006, was at the press conference. Four cyclists in Quebec, on a section of the highway that didn't have a paved shoulder, were just recently killed. One of my colleagues sent me this clipping from September 20—I assume it's from Ottawa—talking about John Barton, who was recently killed on August 13 riding on a highway where the bike lane was closed.

So there are some very, very significant safety concerns, particularly for cyclists, that would certainly be the number one consideration, especially if you have an east-west highway where you're driving into the sun. If a cyclist is on the paved part, you can't even see them at certain times of the day. That little bit of paved shoulder just creates a huge safety advantage.

According to the British Medical Journal, the most important deterrent to riding bikes expressed by non-cyclists is fear of motor traffic. Canadian data suggests that "provinces that have invested the most in cycling tend to have the highest rates of cycling and also the lowest rates of cycling mortality," and that's similar to European data. "Highway capacity and safety is improved for both cyclists and motorists through the provision of a separate travel space and increased clearances." Studies in the US, Israel and Australia report that accidents are significantly reduced on a per-vehicle-kilometre basis where paved shoulders exist. Accident reduction ranges vary from 15% in Minnesota to 60% in Australia, and a 20% to 50% reduction in run-off-road crashes. A metre of asphalt may not sound like a huge buffer, but it can be the difference between life and death. There are obvious safety benefits.

I don't have much time, so I'm going to race through some of the other benefits.

Health is a huge benefit. I know there was an article in the Toronto Star last week about the cost of diabetes. The cost of diabetes is over \$4 billion, and it's predicted to be up to \$7 billion by 2020. You can reduce the incidence of diabetes by more active living.

By creating more places for people to cycle, that's an opportunity for more activity.

We have a lot of young people who have obesity problems. Once again, providing an opportunity to be active and for people to ride to work or to ride for recreation will have tremendous benefits in terms of the quality of life for those individuals, but also in terms of costs to our health system.

There are tremendous economic benefits for tourism. This past Victoria Day weekend, my wife, Christine, and I decided to go to Prince Edward county and spend a couple of days there. We took kayaks and bicycles. For a lot of people, cycling is one of the things that they'll be looking for in an area. They may not be going only to cycle—they may be going to golf and kayak and who knows what else—but that's one of the things that, for a lot of people, is on the list.

When we were in Prince Edward county, I noted that some of the shoulders were paved. On the cycling maps they hand out, they actually note which shoulders are paved and which are not paved. It's a big benefit for people living year-round and also for visitors and for cottagers—for tourism. It's the 10th most common outdoor activity.

Poor cycling infrastructure and safety are much larger deterrents to bicycling than poor weather. In fact, European countries with similar weather to Ontario have a much higher cycling rate.

"A big part of tourism strategy is to continue adding cycling opportunities"—that's from Steve Furness, Owen Sound's tourism manager.

At the very beginning of my talk, I neglected to note that Dan Andrews, director of the Trans Canada Trail Ontario, is here today visiting with us. Thank you very much, Dan, for coming in. This is what Dan has to say: "Coupled with the ongoing move towards healthier communities in Ontario and getting people moving in alternative ways, this action will increase cycling tourism destination development by providing operators with a mix of local recreational trail and on-road routes to attract visitors."

I can see I've only got three minutes left, and I'm not going to be able to get through everything I wanted to say.

Obviously, there are tremendous benefits for tourism. We had the first Bike Train coming to Parry Sound—Muskoka a month or so ago, making a stop in Gravenhurst. People came up from Toronto with their bikes, spent the weekend and got the train back. It also went to South River, North Bay and the Niagara area. I can see that happening more and more in the future, and it will happen more in areas where they know they can safely cycle.

It's also safer for motorists. There's a common accident in driving: Someone is driving on a secondary highway, they drift on to the shoulder, and depending on the shoulder they might drop down a bit, the driver overreacts, overcorrects, and they either spin out into the ditch or they spin out into oncoming traffic. There have

been many cases where people are killed in accidents like that. Obviously, if the shoulder is paved, there's a little bit more of a margin of safety for the motorist.

There are also cost benefits in terms of the maintenance of the road. I know that you don't have to grade the shoulder as much, so there's that benefit of saving on that maintenance cost. Eleanor McMahon, at the press conference, stated that that's a 15-year payoff. So there is a payoff just from that alone.

In the last minute, I would like to just note that I received a letter from the District Municipality of Muskoka that was lending support to my private member's bill. They talk about the fact that they have an active transportation strategy, in recognition of the important health and tourism benefits of active transportation:

"The district of Muskoka has recently adopted an active transportation strategy that identifies bicycle routes, primarily based on the district road system. In order to improve safety, the strategy recommends the installation of Share the Road and way-finding signage and/or paved shoulders along Muskoka roads identified as being part of the active transportation network."

I won't have time to read the whole letter, so I'll conclude with, "It is our understanding that you are planning to introduce a private member's bill to promote the paving of road shoulders on provincial highways that are scheduled for resurfacing. The district of Muskoka would support any efforts of the province to promote cycling, and other forms of active transportation. I would be pleased to meet with provincial representatives to discuss this further."

That's from Gord Adams.

1540

I have received a tremendous amount of support in the last week, since doing a news conference, from health units from other areas that are interested in active transportation, from cycling shops, from many different organizations. I just think it makes sense, based on some of the various positives I have just outlined, and I would love to see the province adopt it as a policy so we have many more opportunities for safe cycling around the province of Ontario.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to talk about this private member's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to support this bill because I think it's eminently reasonable, and I love it when Tories are reasonable. You just can't help but like them—right?—when they do that. You read through the bill and you say, "What is bad about this bill? Not much."

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka says, "The construction must occur when the highway or portion of it is significantly repaved or resurfaced." It doesn't sound revolutionary to me. Common sense, right? I thought I would get a chuckle from the Common Sense Revolution times, but I got nothing.

It makes sense. And, "The minister is not required to construct a paved shoulder where doing so would be

impracticable." Even more sense. So he's saying to the Liberals, "Let's work together on this," right? I'm saying to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, it's something New Democrats find reasonable.

He makes a good case that this is good for matters of safety. I can't imagine walking on a secondary highway or on a highway that doesn't have a paved area for someone like me to walk on it, and it would be dangerous to do so, so it discourages people from walking. Secondly, cyclists dare not cycle on a highway that doesn't have a paved shoulder and/or where doing so could cause harm to the cyclist and/or driver. Particularly, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka says that from time to time, car drivers, if they are not paying attention very much, could end up on the shoulder where it goes down and it's not surfaced very well and there are stones. That could cause a driver to, of course, turn to the left in a way that could be dangerous, causing harm not just to himself but to others.

There's a whole wide swath of reasons to pave the shoulders by one metre, as the member has recommended. That deserves our support.

Originally, I was just going to say, "This is a reasonable bill. I'm going to support it," and I was going to sit down. Then I thought I would say a few words. There isn't much to say by way of opposition. I'm looking forward to see who's got the lead from the Liberal Party and what arguments they are going to make against the bill. I think it's coming from the other side, because on this side they're quiet. I'll be waiting to hear—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Tons.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Tons. Mike Brown's got tons. I'm going to sit down and listen to your arguments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to thank the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for bringing this private member's bill to the Legislature, and in doing so, I think I've got to put it in a bit of context. I represent a constituency with 2,234 kilometres of provincial highway in it. That is the second-largest constituency for highways in the province—our friend from Kenora–Rainy River has the largest number of kilometres—and I am pleased that we are already where the member is suggesting, at least in terms of building shoulders to highways. I can say that because the district of Manitoulin is one of the districts I represent, and on Highway 6—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So you're doing it?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Yes, we are already starting to do this. We are in the midst; the project had already been tendered on Highway 6 and was about to be built when the Minister of Transportation announced that we were to build up to one-metre shoulders, where practical, along that section of highway.

My good friend from—let's see, I'll get this right—Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, in the Bruce Peninsula just to the south of Manitoulin, also has a section of Highway 6 that is being redeveloped now and reconstructed. It also had the shoulders up to one metre that are going to be placed on that road.

I've represented a good portion of this riding for 23 years, and I've experienced the death of a cyclist—I'm trying to think of when, but it's probably pretty close to 23 years ago—on Highway 6 on La Cloche Island, which, most people would know, is the island just before you get to Manitoulin as you come south from Espanola. It is a very straight, wide-open, flat stretch of highway, yet a cyclist was killed there. A fellow by the name of Bill Caesar from Little Current lobbied at that point to have, when the highways were reconstructed, broader shoulders.

I'm pleased to report to you today that most of the work—well, all of the work on Highway 6 from Espanola through to Little Current is now complete. For most of it, there is a metre-wide shoulder. In some places, it is impractical to do that because of guard rails and certain things like that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, it's not exactly the cycling capital of Ontario, is it, Mike?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I hear the member from Renfrew say that it's not the cycling capital. Our people think it can be. Our people think that the district of Manitoulin, the major part of the which is an island, is an excellent place to have cyclists come to experience their passion—because for most people it is.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka probably knows our friend J.J. Hilsinger from the Water Tower Inn in Sault Ste. Marie, who has cycled from the north part of Africa to the southern tip—an amazing feat for not a young guy—and then followed that up by cycling across Asia, literally. That is quite the thing to do, I think most members would think. He was telling me the other day that he believes that places like Manitoulin, places like Muskoka and other places that have a highway network could benefit from this. I think also that St. Joseph Island, being an island, could do this.

I would tell the member—and I'm sure the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka knows it—that the section of Highway 17 from Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie probably has a shoulder that is inches in most places, and it has far more cycling traffic on it than either Highway 6 down to Manitoulin or any of these other spots. I am absolutely afraid that those people out there cycling on that part of the highway are really putting their lives at risk. We have transport trucks by the hundreds go across there. It is the TransCanada Highway. It is how trucks move from western Canada to eastern Canada and vice versa. That section of highway, I would guess just by being out there a lot, has far more traffic of cyclists and transport trucks than anyplace else that I can think of in the constituency.

I would suggest to the member that the initiative is good. We will be supporting it. I think I have a little problem in the logistics, but that could work out. If you're going to actually have cycling trails, you can't just wait until they're going to redevelop part of the highway; you've kind of got to do it for the length of the highway in between places. I think you would recognize that as just a practical concern. It also is an expensive concern. Given the fact that we already have the safest highways

in North America, we have to ensure that we maintain that status.

I just want to tell the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka that we will be happily supporting his private member's bill, and I'm glad that, in some sense, he's catching up to where the government already is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to rise today and support my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka on his Bill 100, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act. I listened to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin; I will speak to that as well.

But the one thing that we do know is that the activity of cycling is becoming more and more prevalent each and every day: for recreational purposes, for health purposes. For many, many reasons, people are taking up the activity of cycling here on our highways in Ontario, and at the same time, our vehicular traffic continues to increase as well. So when you have an increasing number of cyclists and an increasing number of vehicles, the potential for vehicle-cyclist conflict increases. For that reason, I think that what my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka is asking for and suggesting is very practical and necessary.

1550

I know that my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin spoke about the improvements to roads up in his district with respect to paved shoulders, and that's good; that's wonderful. But I also can tell you from my own experience, for example, in 2005 the highway between Eganville and Douglas was reconstructed, and at that time, there were significant changes made to corners—they were made safer and elongated so that they were less sharp—and at that time they didn't establish paved shoulders on that highway. So that kind of project has now kind of gone. There are spots where there are passing lanes, yes, but there's not a consistent paved shoulder on that highway between Eganville and Douglas, which I drive on a regular basis, and that would have been a good initiative at that time.

So what I'm saying to my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin is, yes, the government can choose and the minister can choose to compel, suggest or otherwise, that there be a paved shoulder on that stretch of highway, but it's not required. This would require it, where practical, and as those potential conflicts increase, I think that would be very, very necessary. There is no question about it: It would add to safety; no question about it. I know my colleague talked about studies in the States. I have some here from Minnesota that implied the same thing. There's one from Iowa that reduced incidents by over 50%.

Interestingly enough, 15 years ago, the province of Quebec—probably on federal money—made the commitment, via its bicycle policy, to pave the shoulders of highways, promising to act wherever it resurfaces any such road bearing a daily traffic load of more than 5,000 vehicles. Quebec's Route verte infused \$5.4 million into the provincial economy in its first year of operation. So

they are ahead of the curve on this—no pun intended—with respect to safety on this issue.

When I speak about curves, I want to paint a scenario here. For those of you who live where there are a lot of four-lane highways, you may not see this as being as pertinent, but in my riding—and I know the member for Etobicoke knows it well, because she has visited my riding on more than one occasion—we have a lot of curvy roads and we also have a lot of tractor-trailer traffic. So here's the scenario: There is a tractor-trailer travelling east and a tractor-trailer travelling west. They're converging near a corner, and there's a cyclist or maybe a group of four or five cyclists who are in the middle of that corner. It's very, very difficult for those tractor-trailers to slow down enough, or stop if necessary, to ensure the safety of those cyclists. I run into it all the time myself, and I have made it a practice that, if necessary, I will come to a stop in order not to crowd the cyclist. The last thing I ever want to wake up to in the morning is to say that I killed a cyclist yesterday, because that would remind me every day. So I tend to be very careful, and I drive those roads all the time, but when you're travelling with a tractor-trailer that's a little less manoeuvrable and a little less nimble than my vehicle, it is a very, very dangerous scenario. And I see it all the time, where a cyclist and a large vehicle are having—it's a scary thing. If you're riding a bicycle that is of a mountain bike variety, you can leave that paved shoulder, that paved portion of the highway, even if you have to get on the gravel shoulder—carefully. But if you're driving a road bike with those thin little tires, you hit that shoulder and you're down. For various reasons, this is something that the government should be considering.

I can also tell you that back in 2008, I wrote a letter to the then Minister of Transportation, asking him for something very similar along these lines. I was actually not as brave as my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka; I only asked for two feet of shoulder at that time.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yikes. Two feet?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just two feet. The response I got was one that was not—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: “We can't do it. We can't afford it.”

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pretty well “can't do it,” yes.

Anyhow, I think that this is a great initiative. I commend my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka for bringing it forward. I believe it will enhance road safety for everyone here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's absolutely an honour to stand and support this bill. It's something we've been talking about in the New Democratic Party for a long time now. Last year, when I brought in my three-foot bill—only because it's called that in other jurisdictions—our one-metre bill for city cyclists, keeping drivers three feet away from city cyclists, it was for the same reasons, the same safety, environmental and health concerns that my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka has brought forward this bill, he being outside the city.

I have to say that it's not only for cyclists. I was out in the country this summer and was preparing for the half marathon. I know there are many members here who are doing the waterfront marathon next weekend, half or 5K. Trust me, it's safer to run along city streets than it is in the country and rural Ontario. Why? Because cars are travelling a lot faster, and there's not a paved shoulder on many of those highways. It's really quite frightening. You have to run facing traffic, and even then, it's concerning.

Absolutely, this is a no-brainer. I want to make it very clear to those watching or listening from home that we're not talking about a massive infrastructure investment here; we are talking about a retrofit process of those highways that are going to be worked on anyway. The highways that are going to be worked on anyway should be worked on with some intelligence and some foresight and in a way that keeps everyone safe—everyone.

Of course, anything that increases cycling is what we should be after. Anyone who has been to Denmark, Sweden or Amsterdam and has witnessed how those societies function would want to see cycling increased here. This is not only environmentally sound; it's also, of course, as others have pointed out, for our own health. But if we don't have safety as part of the package for cyclists, people will not bicycle.

I remember growing up in downtown Toronto; I grew up on Bedford Road, about two blocks north of Bloor Street. My mother wouldn't let me have a bike—and that was 15 or 20 years ago—because it was too dangerous back then. We've increased the flow of traffic significantly since then. It has become significantly more dangerous since then. I look at my own children, who cycle, and I'm concerned about their health in the city, never mind going out in the country.

You heard about Eleanor and her husband, the officer who was struck and killed doing exactly that. I would remind people listening and watching this that the bike summit is happening next week in Burlington. I know my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka will be there, as will I.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I think he's going to be there. It's incredibly important that we speak about this, that we speak about these issues, not only to the biking community, at such things as the bike summit, but to our friends and neighbours and to our constituents. Cycling needs to become easier, and it needs to become safer if we're going to help our environment.

One of the major causes, if not the major cause, of climate change in this country is too much driving. A friend of mine in the environmental movement said we should all feel a little guilty whenever we put gas in our cars. No kidding. But if we're to get out of our cars, we have to make cycling safer.

Absolutely, I support this initiative. There's no question about it. Again, I witnessed the member from Algoma–Manitoulin—yes, Highway 6, absolutely. We were calling for that actually at the press conference I did

for the three-foot rule. That got a lot of excitement going in the press and a lot of excitement going in the cycling community, and that was over a year ago. We were calling for highways to have—exactly what my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka is calling for in his bill—a metre of paved shoulder on highways. We were delighted when we saw it happen, through the Minister of Transportation. In fact, kudos for that move.

1600

But this is hit-and-miss, so to speak. This is not a government program, right? This is not a law. What my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka would like to see is that this become *de rigueur* for this government, that this become necessary; that whenever they rebuild, whenever they fix up, whenever they put in a new highway, this is part of the package so that we don't have to rely on the largesse of the Ministry of Transportation to just respond on an ad hoc basis. That's the difference. That's the difference between what the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka is recommending and what the government is doing. That's the gap we want to fill here.

So, absolutely; I mean, there's no question. This is clearly a bill that won't cost very much—I imagine my friend has costed it out in some way, shape or form—certainly not as much as the alternative, which is to leave things the way they are. And certainly, to leave things the way they are means that we will see more cyclists' deaths in rural Ontario.

Meanwhile, in downtown Toronto, where I'm from, we fight for similar moves on behalf of this government. In fact, the three-foot or one-metre rule for keeping cars away from cyclists, certainly more bike lanes, better-protected bike lanes—these are all moves that we need to be fighting for in our own constituencies, no matter where we are.

We need to be able to live in an Ontario where no mother has to say to any child ever again, “You can't have a bike; it's not safe to ride.” For that reason alone I support the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and his brave move and will say the same at the bike summit next week in Burlington. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to stand and to support my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, who, in the seven years that I've been here, in my mind has always had a reputation for being an effective and enlightened member and from whom, actually, I've learned a fair amount about life and conduct in the Legislature.

This is one that those members of the governing party are going to support because, among other things, we're inclined to like the bill. We're inclined to like what it proposes to do.

Many of us who have ridden our bikes all of our lives, and I'm one of those, know exactly what it feels like to be riding on a highway and to be passed by a speeding truck or a bus. You've felt the suction from the backwash of the air; you've been splashed with slush; you've been splashed with water; you've been honked at. You've

probably been very close to being sideswiped, and you've thought to yourself, “Gosh, I hope this is just not my day. I'd just like to get home and off this highway in one piece.”

Some of the measures being quoted here allow both cyclists and motorists a little bit of breathing room, literally and figuratively, to be able to occupy the same piece of real estate but to be physically separate.

I've read the bill, and there are some things in it—like most private members' bills, it's a work in progress. In its first draft the bill says that it applies to every King's Highway. It talks about the fact that if any portion of a highway doesn't have a paved shoulder—and it talks about the construction of a paved shoulder, that it must occur and that the paved shoulder must extend one metre. It does allow for a little bit of wiggle room on behalf of the ministry, and it says the minister is not required to construct a paved shoulder to any portion of a highway “where to do so would be impracticable.”

Accepting the fact that this is an intention to make life better for both motorists and cyclists, I think this is an excellent first start.

It's worth noting that Ontario has already awarded more than \$750,000 to 33 municipalities for projects that promote alternative forms of transportation, be it \$35,000 in my own city of Mississauga for secure bike parking lots; \$18,000 in the member's own riding for share-the-road signage; \$50,000 in Waterloo for more parking structures for bikes. But the member is talking more about the actual act of paved shoulders.

In federal-provincial grants, I'm looking at three very significant projects totalling about \$400,000, with roughly half of it from the province and the other half from the feds, leading to, in the member's own riding, extensions and upgradings of bike paths and trails that contribute to doing exactly what the member is proposing. So very clearly, the province, the member, the feds and, presumably, the municipalities are seeing the wisdom of being able to use your bicycle more safely and to get more places.

I guess, in something very intangible, I'm glad to see the member has come over on to the side of more infrastructure spending and recognizes, along with our government, the feds and the cities, that this is indeed a stimulus. In fact, let me quote from a couple of things that the member himself didn't get a chance to get to; I said I would try to get them on the record.

A Danish cost-benefit analysis study estimated that an investment of under half a billion euros would lead to a \$7-billion government saving. In Iowa, the Department of Transportation reports up to \$366 per mile in cost savings; again, the methodology of the study is not set out, but just quoting that at its face value. The Texas Transportation Institute suggested that bike lanes and paved shoulders have been found to have a benefit-to-cost ratio of approximately 5 to 1. North Carolina State University found something similar in a 9-to-1 cost ratio.

Where we are with this particular bill is as an expression of intent. We recognize that there is benefit for both motorists and cyclists. Our ministry has estimated

that to do more or less what's proposed by the member, using Iowa State University studies that suggest \$53,000 per mile to pave the amount of shoulder that is being suggested, would require an estimated investment of about a half a billion dollars on the part of the Ministry of Transportation to accomplish what the member is proposing—nearly 15,000 kilometres of bike paths in Ontario on the King's highways.

Accepting that we are not here to resolve all of these issues and to solve all of the problems in bringing forth an issue which I think, as a cyclist and as someone who is interested in helping people stay healthy, to use their bikes for those six or seven months in the year when we can—I think the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has brought forth a thoughtful, reasonable private member's bill that deserves some further study by the ministry or in committee. I would be pleased to be a part of that. I thank him for bringing the bill forward. I intend to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm happy to rise today to support my colleague the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's Bill 100, the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Amendment Act. It's certainly, in my opinion, a bill that deserves to go to committee and to be adopted by this Legislature.

I can think of so many reasons; first of all, this whole issue around public safety. I don't know how many times I've been on provincial highways, and even county roads, when I've come across people biking and they would not move over, because they're going over to a gravel shoulder. It could easily have caused an accident. I think the fact that we want to save lives and we put so much emphasis on things like helmets etc.—the public safety factor alone is key to this.

I'm so pleased today to see the Minister of Health Promotion in the House because I believe that when people are out biking and walking and using the resources we have in Ontario, it's good for people's physical fitness. Of course, that's why so many people use their bikes in the beginning. It's another factor that makes our provincial highways available to the citizens of this province in a healthy and safe manner.

1610

Another factor I thought that we should zero in on is the whole factor around tourism and the fact that when you have these initial investments—and maybe over the long period it is \$400 million or \$500 million, whatever we were talking about earlier. This is meant to be phased in. But you can just imagine, if you can create an environment in the province where biking tourism was as important as some of the other factors that we have in tourism today as well—I think this is something that the whole Ministry of Tourism would really capitalize on and should support as well.

I can tell you that the first area that I've seen in Ontario with this is the region of Waterloo. I was so impressed with what they had done around the Gamebridge area in the region. They've just done some amazing

walking trails and biking trails. And when they decided to do county road 47 from Casino Rama out to Washago, I actually asked, at that point, the county of Simcoe at some of their public meetings, "Why do you not have a biking lane here on the side of this road? Because there are so many cottages in that area, there are so many campgrounds, so many tourism operators." They looked at me and said, "Well, it's not a policy we have, we're not planning on moving in that direction and we're not going to go ahead with it." However, I think it would have been a great investment and that would have helped on the east side of Lake Couchiching at that point.

I also want to point out that I've got a colleague—a friend of mine, a constituent—who is actually out in Calgary right now, but he heard about my colleague's private member's bill. He just writes this little note:

"Garfield,

"Have you seen anything on this bill which seeks wider paved shoulders for us cyclists? Does it have a snowball's chance at QP?"

"I like the idea of it helping cycling tourism—something that could take off in our area and really help the economy. Just look at the Niagara region cycle tour industry or Vermont, France, Italy, California the list is ever growing. Trek tours are very prestigious—I rode Texas with them and met Lance Armstrong—they have a program in Niagara now that sells worldwide." He just points out that he's asking about this from the tourism aspect.

I think, if we're sincere about these types of things, we've seen some really good private members' legislation here this afternoon: the two on the food banks, and, of course, this one here I think is an excellent bill as well. I really hope the House will support this today and not just pretend it doesn't exist and let it go into a black hole forever. Let's get it out there. Let's get this thing over to a committee and get the House leaders to agree to take it forward so that we can save lives and so we can promote tourism. This shouldn't be something that's left to an election time or a point where somebody's going to try to campaign on it. This is something that's a winner for everybody in Ontario right now. It's a long-term project that's good for everyone, and I just thank my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka for having the foresight and the thoughtfulness behind this to bring this bill forward. I think it's very positive for the economy, for public safety, for the cycling industry and for the people who like to walk and run along the sides of our highways.

I know, myself, I walk every day of my life. I walk at least an hour. Down in Toronto here, of course, I walk on sidewalks, but up home I have to walk on gravel shoulders. I don't have a problem with that, but I can tell you that the people who bike, they certainly would have a benefit in the asphalt shoulders. So I'd ask everyone to support this legislation today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to lend my voice in support, as the critic for transportation in the New Demo-

cratic Party, to Mr. Miller's bill—the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I'm not supposed to say his name, but his riding.

I've got to take the opportunity, because we're talking about paved shoulders, to, I guess, give a plea to members in the House. If you're going to pave shoulders, can you give us the unpaved ones—put them onto highways and send them up north? Because in many of the communities that I represent, we don't even have roads, so it would be really appreciated when it comes to building roads in this province if the government of Ontario could turn its attention to actually building roads in places across Ontario that currently don't have roads and find themselves as fly-in communities.

In a lot of the communities that I represent, the only way that you're able to get anything in, quite frankly, is by barge in the summer, if the channel hasn't been silted, but by and large, everything is flown in by planes. It really adds to the cost of absolutely everything. Building a house, buying a box of cereal, buying food for your family, anything—it's extremely expensive.

If you're living in communities like Kasabonika, Attawapiskat, Fort Severn or Peawanuck, you're going to pay quite a bit of money for very basic essentials, things like milk, eggs, diapers for your baby; all those kinds of things you're going to pay through the nose for, and the reason for that is there is no real transportation infrastructure there.

I say this in jest to my friend, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka: I just want to say, yes, I will support your bill, but I'd be remiss if I didn't put on the record that we have a long way to go in this province towards making sure that all Ontarians have an ability to share in the transportation infrastructure that we all use in northern and in southern Ontario. So I would say that.

On the issue of road safety that the member raises, he's 100% right, and I think all of us can agree on this one. There are more and more people now who are using bikes for touring. I see them on Highway 11, I see them on Highway 655 as I'm driving around my riding: people who are using their bicycles as a means of being able to have a little holiday; people from different parts of the province and people from different parts of the country.

In some places, paved highways make perfectly good sense in order to ensure that in the end we're able to make safe both people who are on their bicycles—and, in some cases, pedestrians—and make it safe for drivers as well.

So I just want to say, as the transportation critic for the New Democratic Party, we will support this particular motion and hope that the government sees its way to being able to support it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Mr. Miller, has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Norm Miller: I want to thank those who participated. I'd first of all actually like to thank Penelope Yu, who's a University of Waterloo co-op student who's been working in my office the last few weeks and did

some research on finding some of the facts and figures for this. Thank you, Penelope.

I'd like to thank those who participated in the debate today: the member from Trinity–Spadina and the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. He referred to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I did talk to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and he told me he was in support of this. He mentioned Highway 6 running through his riding. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke; the member from Parkdale–High Park, who I know has another private member's bill as well; the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, and thank you for getting those extra facts on that I didn't have time to get into my presentation; the members for Simcoe North and Timmins–James Bay.

There are other jurisdictions that are a little bit in front of us, I would say: places like Quebec, BC and some of the US states. I think this bill, which would require highways that are designated by regulation when they're rebuilt to have at least a metre of paved shoulder where practical, just makes sense for many of the reasons that have been outlined: safety, opportunity to ride, health improvements for individuals, safety for drivers, maintenance savings and benefits to the environment. So I would just ask for support from all members.

I also want to thank those who helped me out with my news conference last week: Eleanor McMahon from Share the Road Coalition and Margaret Casey from Muskoka Trails Council. I also want to thank Dan Andrews, director of TransCanada Trail Ontario, for being here today to watch the proceedings.

Thank you very much, and I ask for your support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has expired. It's now time to vote. I'll ask the members to take their seats.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll deal first with ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Rinaldi has moved private member's notice of motion number 46. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT (FOOD BANK DONATION TAX CREDIT FOR FARMERS), 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS (CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT AUX AGRICULTEURS POUR DON À UNE BANQUE ALIMENTAIRE)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 29.

Mr. Bailey has moved second reading of Bill 78, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to provide a tax credit to farmers for donating to Ontario food banks certain agricultural products they produced.

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

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I move that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

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

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT
DES VOIES PUBLIQUES
ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 30.

Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act.

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

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Norm Miller: I move that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the standing committee? Agreed? So ordered.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now call orders of the day. Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until next Monday at—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That's next Wednesday at 9 a.m. So if you're here on Monday, blame me.

The House adjourned at 1621.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|---|---|---|
| Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB) | Hamilton Mountain | Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées |
| Albanese, Laura (LIB) | York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston | |
| Arnott, Ted (PC) | Wellington–Halton Hills | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Arthurs, Wayne (LIB) | Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est | |
| Bailey, Robert (PC) | Sarnia–Lambton | |
| Balkissoon, Bas (LIB) | Scarborough–Rouge River | |
| Barrett, Toby (PC) | Haldimand–Norfolk | |
| Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB) | Sudbury | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement |
| Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB) | London West / London-Ouest | Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB) | Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest | |
| Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB) | Scarborough–Guildwood | Minister of Health Promotion and Sport / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé et du Sport |
| Bisson, Gilles (NDP) | Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James | |
| Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB) | St. Catharines | Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels |
| Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB) | Etobicoke–Lakeshore | Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine |
| Brown, Michael A. (LIB) | Algoma–Manitoulin | |
| Brownell, Jim (LIB) | Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry | |
| Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | |
| Caplan, David (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB) | Barrie | |
| Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB) | Markham–Unionville | Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture |
| Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB) | Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Chudleigh, Ted (PC) | Halton | |
| Clark, Steve (PC) | Leeds–Grenville | |
| Colle, Mike (LIB) | Eglinton–Lawrence | |
| Craitor, Kim (LIB) | Niagara Falls | |
| Crozier, Bruce (LIB) | Essex | Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président |
| Delaney, Bob (LIB) | Mississauga–Streetsville | |
| Dhillon, Vic (LIB) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Dickson, Joe (LIB) | Ajax–Pickering | |
| DiNovo, Cheri (NDP) | Parkdale–High Park | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB) | Prince Edward–Hastings | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|---|
| Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB) | Windsor–Tecumseh | Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances |
| Dunlop, Garfield (PC) Elliott, Christine (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord Whitby–Oshawa | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |
| Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB) Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB) | Oakville Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville | Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB) | Nickel Belt Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles | Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs |
| Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB) | Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord | Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts |
| Hampton, Howard (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Kenora–Rainy River Oxford | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Hillier, Randy (PC) | Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington | |
| Horwath, Andrea (NDP) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
| Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB) | St. Paul's | Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration |
| Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC) | Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario |
| Jaczek, Helena (LIB) Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB) | Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale | Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles |
| Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP) Kular, Kuldip (LIB) Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB) Leal, Jeff (LIB) Levac, Dave (LIB) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB) | Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud | Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu |
| Marchese, Rosario (NDP) Martiniuk, Gerry (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB) | Trinity–Spadina Cambridge London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord | Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée |
| Mauro, Bill (LIB) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB) | Thunder Bay–Atikokan Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud | Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario |
| McMeekin, Ted (LIB) | Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale | |
| McNeely, Phil (LIB) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB) | Ottawa–Orléans Ottawa–Vanier | Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones |
| Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP) | Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek | |
| Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités |
| Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB) | Huron–Bruce | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC) | Richmond Hill York–Simcoe | Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Murdoch, Bill (PC) Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R (LIB) | Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation |
| Naqvi, Yasir (LIB) O'Toole, John (PC) Oraziotti, David (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB) Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB) Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Durham Sault Ste. Marie Oshawa Kitchener–Conestoga Elgin–Middlesex–London Scarborough–Agincourt | Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Prue, Michael (NDP) Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB) | Beaches–East York Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce |
| Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) Ramal, Khalil (LIB) Ramsay, David (LIB) Rinaldi, Lou (LIB) Ruprecht, Tony (LIB) Sandals, Liz (LIB) Savoline, Joyce (PC) Sergio, Mario (LIB) Shurman, Peter (PC) Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord London–Fanshawe Timiskaming–Cochrane Northumberland–Quinte West Davenport Guelph Burlington York West / York-Ouest Thornhill Nipissing | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement |
| Sorbara, Greg (LIB) Sousa, Charles (LIB) Sterling, Norman W. (PC) Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB) | Vaughan Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud Carleton–Mississippi Mills Toronto–Danforth Mississauga–Erindale | Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux |
| Van Bommel, Maria (LIB) Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB) Wilson, Jim (PC) | Lambton–Kent–Middlesex Perth–Wellington Simcoe–Grey | Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée |
| Witmer, Elizabeth (PC) Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB) Yakabuski, John (PC) | Kitchener–Waterloo Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |
| Zimmer, David (LIB) | Willowdale | |

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craiton
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Amrit Mangat, Phil McNeely
John O'Toole
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Norm Miller
Glen R Murray, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Bob Chiarelli, Steve Clark
Helena Jaczek, Kuldip Kular
Dave Levac, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, David Oraziotti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Donna H. Cansfield, M. Aileen Carroll
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Lisa MacLeod, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Leeanna Pendergast
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Christine Elliott
Peter Kormos, Reza Moridi
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Yasir Naqvi
Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney
Joe Dickson, Sylvia Jones
Amrit Mangat, Norm Miller
Yasir Naqvi, Michael Prue
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Shurman
M. Aileen Carroll, France Gélinas
Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**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
David Caplan, Kim Craiton
Jeff Leal, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Lou Rinaldi
Tony Ruprecht
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Ted McMeekin
Shafiq Qaadri, Khalil Ramal
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