



No. 13

N° 13

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 21 February 2012

Mardi 21 février 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 21 February 2012

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 21 février 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome back. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please observe a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**ATTRACTING INVESTMENT
AND CREATING JOBS ACT, 2012**

**LOI DE 2012 VISANT
À ATTIRER LES INVESTISSEMENTS
ET À CRÉER DES EMPLOIS**

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 6, 2011, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act respecting the continuation and establishment of development funds in order to promote regional economic development in eastern and south-western Ontario / Projet de loi 11, Loi concernant la prorogation et la création de fonds de développement pour promouvoir le développement économique régional dans l'Est et le Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's an honour to rise and offer feedback and comments on Bill 11 on behalf of the official opposition, and it's an honour to be back in this House after a long, long break. We haven't been here since December 8. So let me take a moment to wish you a happy new year, Speaker, and to all MPPs on both sides of the House: Happy new year and all the best in 2012.

Over the break, I did what I'm sure many members in this House did. I returned to my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and spent time with my family and friends and within my community and across the riding. I spoke with members of the community, business and government leaders throughout. I met with entrepreneurs, small businesses, major corporations and large employers. I met with education and development heads, and I met with regular, everyday people: farmers, retirees, shift workers and the unemployed. I even met with Liberals, I met with Conservatives and people of all political stripes. And do you know what virtually every person told me, Mr. Speaker? Things in Ontario need to change. They told me that Ontario needs to take a new course and needs to go in a completely new direction. Over the past

couple of months, the people have told me that they don't want more of the same and that they don't want to keep going down the same path, down the same road that we are currently heading.

It is a great privilege for me to speak so early in the day here today, our first day back, to clearly state to the government some of the many flaws with its current approach, including with this very bill, Bill 11. This bill, bluntly, is another McGuinty spend bill. In fact, it will cost \$160 million. You see, Mr. Speaker, with everything I've heard since we were last in this House, from the community, from local elected officials and municipal governments and, indeed, from the government's own consultant, Don Drummond, I'm more certain than ever that things need to change and that it is time to adapt some of the straightforward and common-sense principles being put forward by the Ontario PC caucus and by our leader, Tim Hudak.

Since 2003, the Liberal government tells us that they have worked closely with the business community and the regional economic development partners to attract new investment and create jobs for Ontario families. The McGuinty government has also told the people of Ontario that they have partnered with companies that are making investments in Ontario and creating jobs. I've even heard some of my friends on the government side talk about their so-called record of economic successes. But, unfortunately, for too many families, this couldn't be further from the truth and certainly does not reflect reality in Ontario today.

As you will know, under the current McGuinty government, Ontario has lost over 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs. And even, at one point, we were losing 100 jobs per hour—100 jobs per hour, Mr. Speaker; that is some very scary stuff. Almost 600,000 Ontario men and women remain out of work—600,000. Ontario is really struggling under Dalton McGuinty and this Liberal government. This, of course, is contributing to Ontario's jobless rate, which has remained above the national average for 61 straight months, or just over five years.

Those are some heavy numbers here first thing in the morning, Mr. Speaker, so let me distil it down for my friends on the government side. For over five years now, Ontario's jobless rate has remained above the national average for the entire country. That's right: The current government has been failing the people of Ontario—those looking for work, especially—for five years now. Worse than average; that's not something to be proud of, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, I constantly see examples of unemployment in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. You see, Speaker, as you know, southwestern Ontario and my riding have been especially hard hit with the downturn of the manufacturing sector. My constituents are coming to me every day, asking why the McGuinty government is doing nothing to repair the economy and nothing to help turn things around in Ontario and help get people back to work. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is not an overstatement.

Let's go back just over the past few months, perhaps go back to the recent election on October 6, 2011. Since then, this government—the McGuinty government—has done one thing: nothing. They haven't brought forward one idea on how to reduce spending or how to save taxpayers any money. They haven't brought forward any ideas on how to create meaningful jobs in my riding or throughout the province of Ontario. They didn't even bother to form any legislative committees to allow for our traditional pre-budget consultations throughout Ontario.

Indeed, Speaker, with this speech from the throne, Premier McGuinty actually brought forward billions in new spending promises: \$2.5 billion in money we don't have and we simply cannot afford.

One thing that has happened since the election is, of course, the continued flow of companies closing shop and those good jobs leaving Ontario. As you will know, earlier this month in London, another 500 full-time jobs left the province. The Caterpillar plant shut down its London-based EMD facility. On top of the 500 jobs at Caterpillar, 1,700 spinoff jobs will be lost in southwestern Ontario—some very sad news for families in my riding and across the London region.

The McGuinty government spent a week attempting to blame anyone and everyone except the provincial government for these new job losses. First, Dalton McGuinty cast the blame at the feet of the company, claiming that it was never their intent to stay in Ontario. With hundreds of new Ontarians on the unemployment line, the Premier then stepped up his blame game and the Caterpillar plant closing became the fault of who? The federal government—as Premier McGuinty stated that Ottawa needed to review the Investment Canada Act to toughen restrictions on foreign ownership.

All this while Dalton McGuinty didn't even bother to pick up the phone and call the company or even bother to let them know that these jobs are important and that Ontario wants these jobs. But that's not all, Speaker. You see, a couple of days before the plant announced its closing, Dalton McGuinty was actually in London speaking to, of all groups, the London Chamber of Commerce. I guess you would think that with a major employer about to close shop and head south, the Premier might take a couple of minutes from his busy schedule to stop over and visit the local plant management—again, do whatever he could personally do to help keep these jobs in London, in Ontario, in Canada. But, no, not our Premier, who had to dash back to Toronto before even

bothering to speak with local plant management. Shameful, Speaker, shameful. No phone call and no visit with the management, and it's no wonder the plant closed to move south. It's no wonder we lost these jobs—these good jobs—because our Premier didn't do anything to stop it, didn't even put up a fight, Speaker.

0910

Well, unfortunately for the workers and all of southwestern Ontario, EMD is just a symptom in the greater disease plaguing the province's economy. Why is the McGuinty government not taking responsibility for the loss of these jobs? At the time that the plant closed, the Premier didn't do anything to try to stop the plant closure. The Premier was too busy to take a proactive approach and try to keep jobs right here in Ontario. Speaker, I'm confused: Is the McGuinty government too busy spending money that they can't be bothered to make a free phone call or set up a free meeting to save already-existing jobs?

Maybe it is not me that is confused, Speaker; I think it's the McGuinty government that is confused. I think it's the McGuinty government limping from one crisis to the next without any real plan, without any clue as to how to solve the problems facing our economy, the problems that their government has caused—and even worsened—with their lack of decisive action. It is time that the Premier takes responsibility for the province's job losses; 600,000 men and women across Ontario out of work today—shameful, Speaker. Dalton McGuinty needs to fix the disaster that he has created, and this is exactly what Don Drummond, the Premier's hand-picked consultant, has stated in his condemning report that was released just last week.

You see, Speaker, for a long time now the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, have been fighting to stop the damage, to stop the madness of the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government. We've been fighting to stop the chaos resulting from eight years of unsustainable spending increase after spending increase, eight years of rapid growth in the size of government, eight years of structural deficits compounding on themselves. Bill 11 is more of the same from the Dalton McGuinty government: more spending, more debt. Future generations have to pay this debt.

Indeed, the last eight years have brought skyrocketing increases in the government's overall expenditures. I'm sure I don't need to tell you, Speaker, but did you know that our spending is up over \$20 billion since the great recession? Coming from a family business, it is my experience that things should work opposite of that: that is, when money gets tight, spending must decrease and savings must be found—but apparently not so for Premier McGuinty.

The problem, of course, is that someone needs to pay for all of his spending and that someone is you and me and all the other hardworking people across Ontario. It is the taxpayers, the small businesses, the farmers, the truck drivers and store owners and factory workers who have to pay for Premier McGuinty's reckless spending spree.

However, we also know that their incomes haven't kept pace with the rapid increase in spending coming from this government. Ontario incomes, and incomes for folks in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, have basically stagnated since this government came to office way back in 2003—not a record to be proud of. So while Ontario incomes remain the same, the cost of government has grown substantially and enormously, to the point that the Premier had to call in outside help to come in and review the books and help determine where things went off the tracks.

Let's remember back just a few months ago, to the recent election campaign and the lead up to the October 6 election, Speaker. I'm sure you can remember, as I can, when Premier McGuinty and this government boasted of being a steady hand in times of economic uncertainty; when Premier McGuinty asked the Ontario public to trust him yet once again and the public had their day and responded by yanking the Liberal mandate and electing a stronger opposition, sending a minority government back to Toronto. Since that day, we have had report after report rejecting the current path and rejecting the current Liberal government.

Speaker, think back just over the past couple of months and we've had the damning report from the Auditor General, the independent officer of this House: a non-partisan report that slammed this government in so many areas for mismanagement and waste. And of course, our monthly job numbers and report after report on the economy continued to leave a sour taste. Then there was Moody's—and don't forget the Conference Board of Canada report—and now we have the long-awaited Don Drummond report, the final sad, sorry repudiation of the McGuinty government's wasteful mismanagement.

The simple fact is, we would not be in the situation we are in, with high unemployment, ridiculous energy prices, skyrocketing debt and an uncontrollable deficit, if it were not for the Dalton McGuinty government—this government's mismanagement of our total economy. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for this government's uncontrolled spending.

The number \$411 billion is staring at us, Speaker. This is Dalton McGuinty's big debt number. This is his debt. Bill 11 adds to our debt and debt for families across the province of Ontario. Addictions are certainly nothing to make light of, but I cannot think of a better or more fair term to describe this government's spending habits other than to call them an addiction. Here we are again with this bill, Bill 11, calling for more spending, larger government and another charge into the old government credit card express, and it just keeps right on going: another \$2.5 billion since the election alone, which was only four months ago.

The recent Drummond report is a scathing report card on our provincial well-being, our current direction and leadership, and it's an eye-opener that we need to start doing business differently, that this government and future governments need to start doing business different-

ly. We simply cannot continue down the current path. We cannot proceed with the same failed Liberal policies. Drummond clearly states that it is time for new ideas and new approaches to how our government operates, and his over 700 pages are a road map that must be acted upon.

The document also provides proof of a very serious spending crisis—a crisis far worse than we imagined, worse than we ever thought and certainly worse than Premier McGuinty acknowledged.

Drummond also says that tough decisions will need to be made, that sacrifices will occur and that the remedial action required to get our financial house in order will be a tough pill to swallow. Despite this, Drummond says that we must act now, we must make changes or risk becoming the next Greece or Spain, hopelessly in debt and in complete and utter shambles.

Now we are back in the House, back to do the people's business and back to get Ontario on to the right track, and I am pleased to urge and challenge this government to do whatever is necessary and do what your own hand-picked expert says. Take the tough medicine that the doctor has prescribed and start putting the recommendations from the Drummond report into play, start making changes to the way we do government in Ontario.

But do you know what, Speaker? Nothing I've seen since this government has been elected gives me hope that they will or even can act on these important recommendations. It's no secret Ontarians have very little faith in this government to cut spending and reduce the size and overall cost of government and create jobs. It's just not in the Liberals' DNA. What we need is an immediate action plan from this government to clean up the mess—the mess that they created, the mess that they've allowed to grow and fester, untamed and unmanned. But that's not what we're going to get.

We're here today debating Bill 11, part of the same tired and washed-up approach that got us into this problem in the first place. The Ontario PC Party, the PC caucus, the official opposition party in this House—we understand what Don Drummond has stated. We understand what he has recommended and what he has prescribed for Ontario. While his report is detailed and covers numerous areas, the principles are really quite straightforward. We can't afford new spending.

First, only spend what you have. This is funny because this is something my parents taught me, and I'm sure this is something families across Ontario try to teach their children. Spend only what you have. Don't live on credit; don't live on debt, but instead, live within your means. Exercise self-control.

Second, prioritize spending on what really matters: health care and education. Stop with all the unnecessary extras, stop with all the unnecessary bloat and waste, the unnecessary pork that this government has fondly cultivated and grown, and spend our money on what is really important to the people of Ontario. Again, this is health care and education.

Third, and one of my favourite lessons coming from Don Drummond, reduce the size of government. Get

government out of all the areas that it has no business being in. Review and change the way government does business, reduce red tape and unnecessary burden. And for the government: Stick to your knitting.

0920

Speaker, forgive me if I say these things confidently, but this sounds like a discussion around the McNaughton dinner table when I was growing up. Even now, to this day, it sounds like a discussion we have at our family business, McNaughton's in Newbury. It sounds like a discussion families across Ontario have every day. Indeed, I've called on Dalton McGuinty to throw a quarantine around Ontario's economic purse. That's right: no more new spending promises, no new uncoded and one-off spending and no more growth in the size and cost of government.

Further, if this government refuses to act on even one of the recommendations contained within the Drummond report, they would need to come forward with equivalent alternatives or risk Ontario's bankruptcy and future health.

So here we are with Bill 11, and instead of trying to protect the jobs we currently have, the McGuinty government is using taxpayers' dollars to create a new stimulus program, a corporate welfare pork project known as the southwest development fund. But here's the funny thing, Speaker: For all the talk of the Don Drummond report and his approximately 400 recommendations to turn Ontario around, the very first thing we're doing here today is going directly against what Don Drummond has recommended. Indeed, Don Drummond, like Roger Martin before him, has stated that it's time to get Ontario out of the corporate welfare business and out of the business of giving unnecessary subsidies to businesses and corporations. Indeed, it is time to stop picking winners and losers from the Premier's office in downtown Toronto. This is a temporary, band-aid approach to job creation that will not create long-term economic growth, real growth.

Why is the government trying to create new jobs with taxpayer dollars while allowing current full-time jobs, like those at EMD in London, to leave our province? This out-of-control spending is troubling and upsetting. What is more troubling is that not only does the current government do nothing to keep current jobs in Ontario, they do nothing, period. They simply just spend money, blindly and aimlessly—just spend, spend, spend. I often wonder how Dalton McGuinty and his government can sleep peacefully at night while facing a debt of their making that's going to approach \$411 billion. Shameful, Speaker.

An interesting fact is that despite difficult economic circumstances, Ontario has seen some modest growth in the construction industry. You see, I recently met with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business about the WSIB and to discuss the increasing regulation that the construction industry is experiencing. A funny thing is that the McGuinty government's solution to growth seems to be to increase regulation, at least according to these industry leaders.

On January 1, Bill 119 came into effect, a bill that requires companies that employ construction workers to pay for the mandatory insurance that can only be done through the WSIB. On average, this will cost each business an additional \$11,000 per year in insurance premiums. Prior to Bill 119, construction companies were free to get private insurance that often included more comprehensive coverage at a better price than what the WSIB is providing. This new regulation will cost one of the few growing industries in Ontario more money. As a result, employers will have to make cuts in order to accommodate this new expense, cuts that will come in the form of lost jobs, Speaker. Once again, why is the Dalton McGuinty government increasing costs and regulations on one of the few growing industries in this province? It just doesn't make any sense and shows a government that is, again, limping from one problem to the next.

This government has stopped listening to real private sector job creators in this province. Is the goal to have fewer jobs and to stop economic growth? It seems that the McGuinty government thinks as much; at least, that is where they are leading us to.

Speaker, these regulations are costing Ontario workers their jobs, their livelihoods. Why is the Liberal government increasing taxes on one of the few growing industries in Ontario? We need to eliminate red tape and unnecessary regulation in order to allow the economy to grow for Ontario to prosper. The overregulation that Ontario's businesses are seeing is crippling the economy and destroying jobs. Bill 11 is another example of an expense for the government we can't afford.

I was recently contacted by a constituent who is voicing his concern about regulations and the crippling effect it was having on his business. Brian MacKenzie, who is the operations manager at McRobert Fuels, is currently frustrated and outraged with the unnecessary red tape in Ontario. Sadly, his plant's operations have been temporarily shut down, Speaker, because the Ontario government is not certifying enough engineers to perform routine safety checks at the plant—safety checks that this very government requires and has mandated.

He is also frustrated because according to industry regulations, there are several people who must perform these safety checks separately of the others. Why can't one certified individual perform these checks? Why is the current McGuinty government not ensuring that there are enough certified engineers to perform these routine checks?

Instead of blowing money on another wasteful bureaucracy, we have a company that has to shut down operations in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. We have people who want to work. We have people in Ontario who want to be certified. Why is nothing being done to streamline regulations and eliminate red tape so that the people of Ontario can get back to work? This is an example of this government killing jobs in south-western Ontario.

Speaker, it would seem that the McGuinty government is so completely out of touch, so out to lunch, that they

just don't get it. That's right. It's still early in the morning today but the McGuinty Liberals are already out to lunch and, of course, the people stuck paying the tab are the taxpayers in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and taxpayers throughout the entire province of Ontario. From east to west, from north to south, people are stuck paying the tab for this government's over-spending.

The solution for Ontario's job crisis is not more spending and it isn't more regulation. It is certainly not passing Bill 11 here today. Current overregulation and government spending are crippling Ontario's economy and destroying jobs. More spending in the form of this bill will only add to the problem and compound the disaster we are currently facing.

Under Dalton McGuinty, Ontario's debt has more than doubled and will hit \$411 billion in five years, by 2017, if left unchecked, Speaker—\$411 billion. Our deficit will be a crippling \$30 billion in those same five years. If I were a Liberal on the other side of this House I would keep my head down as well because that's absolutely despicable and shameful—irresponsible.

There are no more questions. The report card is in: Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government have a spending problem and for some reason, the Liberals keep telling us that continuing to spend more money will improve jobs and improve the economy. Why don't they understand? Did they not read any of Don Drummond's report, the very report that they bought and paid for with our tax dollars? Here's what Drummond said. He said that instead of things getting better through government stimulus programs, the debt has doubled and Ontario's jobs crisis keeps getting worse.

Dalton McGuinty's spending plan is not working. But don't fear, Speaker: The Ontario PC Party, the Ontario PC caucus and our leader have a plan for economic growth and job creation. The best part about our plan is that it doesn't come with a billion-dollar price tag. This is in comparison to Dalton McGuinty's approach, the approach we are seeing in Bill 11.

It will not be easy but it is realistic. It is no secret that the global economy remains fragile and the road to economic growth will be challenging in the current economic climate—no secret, Speaker. The debt crisis in Europe and the economic competition from low-cost jurisdictions continue to impact on our economy, but we are forgetting some minor details with all of this. The rising deficit and the doubling of Ontario's debt started long before the global economic crisis. It's worth repeating, but we sometimes forget that this crisis of Dalton McGuinty's that we're seeing in Ontario started long before the global economic crisis. The recession hit everyone, but Dalton McGuinty simply has been pursuing the wrong economic policies here in Ontario. The only person who should be blamed for Ontario's economic situation is Dalton McGuinty. It's time that the Premier takes responsibility for his spending and changes his approach. Government spending cannot be what drives the economy, and that is why corporate welfare

and corporate bailouts like Bill 11 are unnecessary and unproductive.

0930

As a small business person and someone who employs over 65 people at our family business, I can tell you that local businesses are suffering and are being left with no choice but to leave Ontario due to the economic climate that has been created here, the climate that this government has created. I've been speaking to many business owners and many entrepreneurs since taking on the role of economic development and innovation critic for our party. Not one single owner has told me that they want welfare and subsidies from government—not one. No one is looking for a handout in Ontario. But you see, under the Dalton McGuinty government, we have seen skyrocketing energy rates, increased red tape and government bureaucracy and an ineffective and antique apprenticeship system. This is why we have a jobs crisis in the province of Ontario.

Under Dalton McGuinty, hydro rates increased eight times since 2003, by a total of 84%, or a whopping 150% for families with smart meters. Despite promising Ontario families that his expensive energy experiments and Green Energy Act would only raise rates by 1%, Dalton McGuinty now admits that hydro bills will rise 46% by 2015. Even the Ontario Energy Board acknowledged Dalton McGuinty's energy experiments were behind the latest hydro increase when they said that new forms of power generation as a result of the Green Energy Act are costing more to produce. Instead of Bill 11, focus on concerns real businesses are faced with.

In my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex—and this is scary, Speaker—there is a retailer who has a local grocery store that is located in a small town where thousands of manufacturing jobs have been lost since 2003. He has a monthly hydro bill of between \$18,000 and \$20,000 a month. His bill used to be less than half of that a short time period ago.

Speaker, how are small businesses supposed to survive in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario? The increase in hydro rates is unacceptable and is crippling Ontario's economy. You and I know that the price of hydro is an economic essential that can help drive the economy forward. I believe policies should be focused on creating an efficient supply of power at affordable prices. Ontario's economic policy has to have a plan for economic development, and the current structure certainly needs to change.

Speaker, the system isn't working. The Auditor General, Moody's investment services, the Conference Board of Canada, the people of Ontario, the official opposition here at Queen's Park and now Don Drummond have all said so, but the Premier refuses to listen and refuses to budge. Competition must be established; this will ensure that there are lower prices and efficient technology. Regulation must be stable. If prices are competitive and regulations are stable, Ontario will attract investment to the province. If there is not competition and prices continue to skyrocket as they have for so long under this

Premier, then we will do nothing more than drive investment out of Ontario.

The current approach to energy is not realistic, nor is it sustainable. The feed-in tariff program is barely two years old, yet the OPA has already been flooded with 10,000 FIT applications and 44,000 microFIT applications—nearly 55,000 applications in two years. We are seeing the hype mount around these energy programs; however, they are not sustainable. The buzz will die down and the bubble will burst. Other provinces and jurisdictions already know this. They understand this concept and they apply it to their policies, for example, in Alberta, where they have successfully used a competitive process. Our friends just over the border, in the southern United States and Texas and much of the Midwestern US, are finding renewable power can't compete in the open market on its own merit. Fifty US states and nine other provinces procure renewable energy using the principles of competition; only in Ontario do we pay developers a flat subsidy.

According to the Ministry of Energy, electricity prices in this province will double over the next 20 years, while the US energy information agency actually projects electricity prices in the US will decrease over the same time period. If you were an entrepreneur looking to start a business, where would you choose? Probably just like EMD in London did, you would choose to locate south of the border, away from the Dalton McGuinty government and his policies, which are failed, non-friendly business policies.

Every jurisdiction we're competing with for jobs and investment is after the same thing: a reliable and diversified supply of power at the lowest cost, Speaker. Currently, Ontario doesn't have this. Under the current structure we are seeing businesses leave Ontario and relocate to a more affordable location. The skyrocketing hydro rates in Ontario are driving business out of Ontario for good. If the government continues on its current path, London Economics International estimates Ontario will have the absolute highest electricity prices in all of Canada by 2015. These electricity prices will be combined with the absolute highest regulatory burden in all of this country, matched by the worst government spending and debt problem in all of Canada, a triple threat working against our recovery.

Speaker, hydro costs are skyrocketing, the people of Ontario can no longer afford to live in Ontario and businesses cannot afford to operate in Ontario. We are losing business every day because the cost of operating is just way too high. This is Dalton McGuinty's legacy as Premier of Ontario: 600,000 and counting unemployed and a staggering debt of \$411 billion if change doesn't happen.

Here in Ontario, we require good home heating at a fair and reasonable price. In order to restore Ontario as an economic leader and to repair the economy, hydro rates must change. Once we have re-established this level playing field, then the best way to attract new investment is with a stable regulatory environment where everyone

knows the rules of the game and they only change in predictable ways. Overregulation must be eliminated and the economy allowed to operate through a free enterprise system. Speaker, my friends across the aisle need to support free enterprise in Ontario.

It is unfair that the rules of the game are constantly changing, and because Ontario lacks stability, business owners are not willing to operate here and are leaving one by one. I see this every day, not just in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex but across southwestern Ontario. Corporate taxes are an example. The Liberals are not reducing corporate taxes one day; then they are reducing them. Now, apparently, they've flipped their position and they're not going to reduce corporate taxes.

The approaches taken by the current government signal that Dalton McGuinty has no long-term vision or plan to get there. It sends the wrong message to investors and developers, small businesses and families alike. The result is that the cost of operation in Ontario is simply unaffordable. It's not the role of the government to micromanage any sector of the economy, nor pick winners or losers like they're trying to do in Bill 11. The current government is micromanaging the economy, over and over again, from the Premier's seat right here in Toronto. Nothing says "out of touch" more than a Premier making decisions from downtown Toronto. Instead, it's the role of the government to create the right conditions for investment and job creation and then to stay out of business affairs.

The Premier of Ontario needs to change the current conditions and help better the economy in Ontario. Ontario must be favourable for businesses to perform. It's about time that the McGuinty government addresses the current economic climate and makes the necessary changes to help repair Ontario's economy for good. This government is so focused on the here and now that it has failed to establish a long-term plan that will make Ontario's economy a leader again.

0940

We face a growing deficit that is double the size of all the other Canadian provinces combined, and has been for four years now. Even through our darkest days, Ontario's tremendous potential has always been there. It's not too late to take a different path, to restore Ontario as an economic leader in this great nation of Canada. That means creating the right conditions for new growth, new investment and new jobs.

But here we are today continuing down the same path as before, blindly throwing money at problems in the hopes that some of it sticks, but this very approach is how we've ended up in the situation we are now in with hundreds of thousands of Ontarians out of work.

Government spending is up 80% since the McGuinty Liberals came to office. Bill 11, again, is more of the same. It's really very simple: The government has a spending problem, and spending more money when you're in debt is a bad decision. It's the wrong decision, and certainly it's not going to help Ontario families get back to work. I learned this in our family business from a

young age. You can only spend more than you make for so long. Dalton McGuinty obviously didn't get the same education.

The Ontario PC Party, our leader, Tim Hudak, and our caucus believe that the current apprenticeship system needs to change. The system is completely out of date and not creating the jobs that Ontarians need.

The Ministry of Finance predicts there will be over one million skilled jobs vacancies by 2021. Despite Ontario's jobs crisis, we have a major skilled labour shortage. Modernizing Ontario's apprenticeship system would help create 200,000 skilled trades jobs over the next four years—sound economic policy. Allowing employers to take on more apprentices and giving more responsibility to colleges to match apprentices up with employers will help more young people find skilled trades jobs.

The PC Party would lower the apprenticeship ratio to one to one, while delegating more responsibility to Ontario's colleges for matching apprentices up with employers. The result would be, again, 200,000 new skilled trades jobs, from sheet metal workers to plumbers to electricians. Again, this is real, common sense, private sector job creation. I don't understand why the government just doesn't listen to the members opposite.

People want to work in the skilled trades, but this government, once again, is preventing job growth and economic growth from happening—shameful. In one simple, practical step we can give 200,000 men and women the opportunity to build a good career in the skilled trades right here in the province of Ontario. Imagine the positive impact that this will have on new home construction, on infrastructure maintenance and on industrial output. Imagine the jobs there, if we want them to be.

In most provinces around this great country, employers are allowed to hire one apprentice for every journeyman employed. In Ontario, some trades require as many as five journeymen to hire one apprentice, limiting the number of young people who can find work. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said that "The sole limiting factor in our ability to train more apprentices is the journeyman/apprentice ratio requirements" in Ontario.

Ontario faces a big and growing jobs-training deficit, producing 46% fewer tradespeople per capita than the rest of the country. Because of Dalton McGuinty's dismal record on creating apprenticeship positions, only one in four Ontario apprentices finishes their job training. Ontario will face up to one million skilled jobs vacancies by 2021 without urgent action to reform an antiquated apprenticeship system. There are jobs that can be created with little to no cost. Why does the government think that the only way to solve problems is to spend more money, like in Bill 11?

Ontario is lagging behind the rest of the world as well. In the 1990s Australia reformed its training system, and the number of apprentices doubled between 1995 and 2000. The United Kingdom, France and Sweden have also increased their number of apprenticeship positions

through similar reforms. This is a method that's tried and true, has worked around the world, Speaker, and is something that this government should consider. This is an opportunity for the Dalton McGuinty government, and they are doing nothing to take advantage of it. Enough is enough. It is time that the spending stops and the current structures that are in place are changed.

Our apprenticeship plan is a real jobs plan; Bill 11 is not.

I hear, time and time again, from my constituents in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex that they don't want a government that picks winners and losers, that pits rural versus urban, that favours one region over another or one industry over another. Most importantly, they want a change in direction, new thinking and new ideas coming from their government. But Dalton McGuinty and his government just don't get it.

It's not just members of the opposition saying this, Speaker. A report in the Ottawa Citizen on November 15—the recent Roger Martin report—has asked that the government abandon "its policy of picking 'winners and losers' ... through subsidies to businesses." This is a respected dean from the Rotman School of Management saying this.

Another interesting fact comes from a study done by the Fraser Institute—and this is staggering, Speaker—that uncovers that the Ontario government has spent a total of \$27.7 billion on corporate welfare. This money has been spent based on the promise that the economic state in Ontario will get better, and we all know that the state of the economy in Ontario is actually getting worse: 600,000 people unemployed, 600,000 men and women unemployed in Ontario; small businesses closing along Main Streets across the province; factories closing across this great province.

It has been proven over and over again that McGuinty's spending legacy is not working. It has proven itself to be a complete and utter failure. The people of Ontario may sit back and ask, "How did this happen? How did the economic state of Ontario get so bad?" You see, Speaker, here in Ontario, revenue is up \$35 billion under the Liberals, but spending is up \$45 billion. This year alone, we are spending \$2 million more each hour than we are taking in through revenue. It doesn't take a math genius to understand that if revenue is up \$35 billion but spending is up \$45 billion, there's going to be a shortfall sooner or later.

This is shameful, despicable and an insult to future generations in this province, that this government doesn't have a spine to act. It's just shameful that this government does not have a spine to act. They had to see it coming for many years; everyone was telling them. But again, this government, in my opinion, Speaker, is completely gutless.

The single biggest cost driver on the spending side is public sector compensation and the total expansion of government. This is not what we stand for, and this is not affordable. It never was affordable, Speaker. That is why we have called for a public sector wage freeze,

something that will save Ontario families over \$2 billion in the next two years alone.

While a public sector wage freeze won't turn our entire province around, it does signal that things are changing in this province and that we will not continue down our current path. It also sends an important message to job creators inside and outside the province that we're getting our fiscal house in order.

You see, what is affordable for Ontario families is creating an attractive environment to run a business, a place where costs are predictable and where small businesses and entrepreneurs can come and grow their business. I believe in a system of free enterprise, a system where people and businesses create jobs. Speaker, I'm proud to say I'm a capitalist.

In Ontario, our revenue is at an all-time high, but it is uncontrolled spending on things like public sector compensation that is a problem. The current government has not posed a single new idea for reining in spending. Premier McGuinty really only knows how to do one thing, and that is to spend.

Speaker, while the people of Ontario want to have a consistent and predictable partner in the Ontario government, the Premier's ideas have proven, time and time again, to get us deeper and deeper into debt. Again, a staggering \$411 billion is staring at us as we come back to work today in the Legislature.

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The reckless spending and inability to define priorities are at the root of the crisis that we face today, and the Premier has no idea what to do. So Premier McGuinty just keeps on spending, hoping that something will work, that something will stick, that something might actually change. But we can't go on hope anymore, Speaker. We can't depend on much these days, but the only thing that we can depend on, if given the chance under Dalton McGuinty, is that spending will increase, the deficit is going to increase, jobs will continue to leave the province, and the people of Ontario will continue to suffer with higher and higher taxes and skyrocketing debt levels.

It's going to take courage, and I urge the Premier to show some courage and some leadership in this position. He hasn't shown it since 2003, and it's time that we see some change.

Our position is quite clear. We can't support any additional spending without significant savings elsewhere. We can't continue writing cheques that we can't cash. We can't buy things that we can't afford. Families in Ontario understand this; small businesses across my riding, across southwestern Ontario, across the entire province understand this; and certainly our leader, Tim Hudak, our PC Party, our PC caucus and our members of the official opposition clearly understand that. We've been demonstrating that since the election on October 6.

To be clear, it's not the government's job to pick winners and losers amongst privately owned companies. Ontario families simply can't afford these subsidies and corporate handouts any longer. Bill 11 is not smart legislation, Speaker.

A week ago, Don Drummond reported that Ontario is going to be faced with a \$411-billion debt, and here we are, first thing back to the Legislature, and the government is calling a spend bill to spend \$160 million—again, just completely out of touch with what's happening. They're obviously not leaving this building, and they're not leaving Toronto, and they're not talking to businesses and families across the province.

Don Drummond knows it, we know it, and it really seems that the only people who don't understand this are the members of the current Liberal government: Red tape and increased government spending are not helping our economy. Instead, we are seeing the debt rise daily. The economy is getting worse and worse because the government is still spending. The McGuinty government has a spending problem, but now that the money has run out, it is time for the spending to stop.

Speaker, as you will know, myself and our leader and our caucus strongly oppose corporate welfare. We strongly oppose government slush funds, such as the one being proposed in Bill 11, and we strongly believe that now is the time to reduce spending, not increase spending. As I have stated here today and as we have stated since the election, we simply cannot support additional spending without significant cutbacks in other areas.

Speaker, we have two crises in the province of Ontario. We have a jobs crisis: 600,000 men and women unemployed. We have a debt crisis: We're going to be approaching \$411 billion by 2017. It's staring us in the face here this morning. Bill 11 will not help in either of these areas.

Again, I just think that the government's actions are despicable. They need courage, they need conviction to make change. I just hope that they look across the aisle to the official opposition; look to our good ideas to get government spending under control. Speaker, if they won't do it, our leader, Tim Hudak, and our party certainly will.

I just urge the government and I urge all members in this House not to support Bill 11. It's more spending that we can't afford: \$160 million proposed.

I go back to my point earlier: I met with hundreds of businesses—and I come from a small business background. Businesses don't want handouts. So for this government to propose a bill that calls for spending and corporate handouts is just completely out of touch. What businesses want are affordable hydro rates and less government red tape. We have 500,000 regulations on the books in the province of Ontario, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that these regulations are costing businesses \$11 billion per year. Think of how many jobs the province's businesses would create if the government allowed job creators to create jobs.

In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario it's tough to do business today. I know; I'm speaking with these business owners. The entrepreneurial spirit is moving elsewhere. It's dead in a lot of areas in this province. Costs are too high; people aren't willing to take a chance in Ontario to start a business, to hire people. We need to restore their

faith and their hope in the province so that they'll start a business, employ people and turn the ship around in Ontario.

As I've mentioned a few times, coming from a small-business background—my brother and I proudly took over from my father a few years ago. This is a family business that my father took over from his father. It started in 1948. I fear that the approach Dalton McGuinty is taking is forcing small businesses to close shop and family businesses to close shop. I have a lot of businesses in my riding that have been in business for 50, 60 and even 100 years, and with the direction this government is taking the province, I'm scared for the future of a lot of businesses in my riding in southwestern Ontario.

I will be proudly voting against Bill 11 and against the ever-expanding McGuinty pork train. I encourage my colleagues here today to join me in opposing continued government expansion and to also vote against Bill 11.

I have a copy of this report from the Fraser Institute that clearly shows the Ontario government has spent almost \$30 billion on corporate welfare—absolutely shameful. Over the past number of years, Ontario's government spent almost \$30 billion on direct subsidies to corporations. "In 2008-09 alone, the bill for corporate welfare amounted to almost" \$3 billion. "For anyone"—this is staggering—"who paid income tax in 2008, the cost of corporate welfare was \$424 per Ontarian (or \$848 per dual-income couple)." This is the McGuinty approach: Spend and unemployment goes up.

"By lowering taxes rates for all and offering subsidies to none, Ontario's government could concentrate its spending and tax policy where it would do the most good."

"Ontario's corporate welfare has an opportunity cost. The province's corporate welfare expenditures could have been redirected (in the current fiscal year) to one of the following..." This is interesting but the Fraser Institute—this is from their report—is saying this is where that money could have gone. The \$3 billion given in 2008-09 could have eliminated Ontario's health premium. It could have eliminated the top personal income tax surtax of 36% and reduced the lower surtax from 20% to 10%. It could further reduce the corporate income tax rate to 8% in 2011 or 2012, or it could reduce Ontario's annual deficit by \$2.7 billion a year.

Governments have spent in Ontario over the last number of years almost \$30 billion in corporate welfare. Clearly, it would have benefited families more going elsewhere. Again, the pork barrelling, the pork train has to end here in Ontario.

To conclude, I just want to ask all MPPs on both sides of this House to stand with me, stand with our party, stand with our leader, and vote against Bill 11. Let's stand on the side of small businesses, family businesses and job creators, Speaker. Let's free job creators to create jobs in the province. Let's get these 600,000 people back to work in the province. And let's hope that between now and the next few days Dalton McGuinty grows a spine and gets the jobs crisis under control and gets the

spending crisis under control, or the province of Ontario is going to be broke. I'll tell you, on our watch on this side of the House we will not let Ontario become the next Greece or Spain. We're stronger than that. We're putting forward positive ideas to restore Ontario to being the best place to live, to work and to start a business.

Speaker, thank you very much.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, a Conservative talking about corporate welfare? I can hardly believe my ears. Man, oh, man, oh, man, what is this world coming to? It's topsy-turvy around here.

But corporate welfare—well, you know, there's a thing called corporate tax cuts that the Conservatives and Liberals are very happy about and keep on doling out and out without any kind of conditions, without any kind of strings attached, and somehow or other that's not considered corporate welfare? Listen, I wasn't going to say anything but I will say that about that.

On this particular bill, I listened to the presentation of the member, and I guess I have a bit of a different opinion in the sense that economic development funds can be quite useful. I come from a part of the province, northern Ontario, where we have the northern heritage fund. The minister who sits across the way would know, as the chair of the fund, it is a very successful fund that has been chaired by members of the Conservative caucus when they were in government and chaired by our people when we were in government, and now by the Liberals, that has done a lot of good work when it comes to economic development in regions of the province that sometimes need help.

The problem for a lot of businesses is they can't access capital. So what do you do when you're trying to access capital to get something up and running so that you can invest in an enterprise of some type that you want to make a return on and at the same time create some jobs?

Is this particular fund set up the way that I would like to see it? Absolutely not. I think we should follow the model of the heritage fund. There should be an actual board. There should be a process by which we determine what type of loans can be put forward with loan guarantees—and sometimes it's a combination of loan and loan guarantees—so that we can actually do some economic development in those parts of the province that are having problems trying to do the kind of economic development that needs to be done.

It will be interesting when this bill goes to committee, because I'm sure that's one of the areas that our members are going to be very interested to talk about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'd like to respond to the comments by the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex concerning Bill 11. Unlike him, I will be supporting Bill

11 and the creation of the southwestern Ontario development fund.

But I think it's really interesting to look at what happened when there was a consultation in Guelph by the Minister of Economic Development on the terms of the southwestern Ontario development fund, its structure. Just as the member from Timmins–James Bay suggested, we need to look at how we set this fund up, because we've got the northern heritage fund and the eastern Ontario development fund, and we need to sort it out.

I expected that we would have people from Guelph come to Guelph, and we did. I expected that we would have people from Waterloo region come; they did. There were people there from the member for Kitchener–Waterloo's riding who are associated with the University of Waterloo and who were very interested in the economic development possibilities around technology. There were people there from the riding of the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, people from both Wellington and Halton, who wanted to know if Halton could be included in the fund.

But I was quite surprised by some of the other places that people came from because they wanted to be included in the fund. There were people there from the riding of Simcoe–Grey. There were people from the riding of York–Simcoe. There were people from the riding of Huron–Bruce. There were people from as far away as Parry Sound–Muskoka who wanted to be included in this. There were people from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. There were people from Perth–Wellington.

The fact is that the people in southwestern Ontario drove to Guelph to say, "We want this fund."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for his speech on Bill 11.

I want to talk about the eastern Ontario development fund in the two minutes that I have. First, you really can't talk about that fund without recognizing Bob Runciman or Norm Sterling, two champions of eastern Ontario economic development.

But I have to tell you there was a story in the Ottawa Citizen during the election talking about the fact that more money was going into Liberal ridings than in Conservative ridings. In fact, they couldn't even come to grips with how much money was left in the fund. The report from the—and I want to thank Lee Greenburg for the report. Some said \$50 million, \$49.4 million, \$48.2 million; some said \$40 million.

I have to admit that after the election—it was actually my birthday—I wrote the minister on November 7 and asked for a meeting. I have to be honest: I was worried that that \$40 million that was left in that fund was going to be taken, cut in half, \$20 million was going to go to the southwest and \$20 million was going to go to the east. So I asked—a very simple request, a very modest request—to have a meeting with all of the eastern Ontario MPPs to talk about the fund, to talk about accountability measures that should be in the fund, to talk about

suggestions that the eastern Ontario wardens talked about for this fund. Nothing. I had to continue to ask the minister and finally, after long last, we shamed him into having a meeting on Thursday.

But I have to tell you, there's lots of confusion. The eastern Ontario wardens think there's money left in the fund. The Ottawa Citizen story would lead you to believe there was money left in the fund. Jean-Marc Lalonde, the architect of the fund, the former member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, when he came to my riding on June 24 admitted there was \$31 million left in the fund. However, Minister Duguid and members of his staff now say there's no money left in the fund. There should be \$25 million if you listened to the Attorney General last month at the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus.

So the wardens think there's money left, the councils think there's money left, economic developers think there's money left. So, mister, you'd better tell us on Thursday where's our—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We've heard it loud and clear throughout Ontario that people are concerned about jobs and are concerned about job creation. So if this eastern/southwestern fund will encourage job creation, if it'll invigorate the economy, then we welcome it. But let's be very clear: We need to have some transparency, we need to have accountability, we need to guarantee that the funds will directly result in jobs being created. There has to be a strong, strings-attached policy. This can't be blank cheques given to corporations. We don't want another Electro-Motive happening in Ontario. We don't want another corporation that gets \$5 million of taxpayer dollars to up and leave because they see a cheaper deal somewhere else.

We want to ensure that there are good jobs, that there are permanent jobs here in Ontario, and if this fund will have the stringent controls in place, the accountability in place, transparency in place, then that's something we can look at, but without that, that's completely unacceptable. We don't want to be giving away our taxpayer dollars to corporations who don't guarantee jobs in this province, who ship out jobs overseas, who ship out jobs down south. That's not acceptable. That's not the Ontario that we want to live in. We want to protect our citizens, protect our community, ensure that there are jobs here for everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, thank you, Speaker, and I will keep this to two minutes or under.

I'd like to thank the MPPs who spoke to my remarks: the members from Timmins–James Bay, Guelph, Leeds–Grenville and Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

But before I get into my closing remarks, I can clearly see where this session is going. It appears—just when it comes to Bill 11—that this is going to be a session where the Dalton McGuinty Liberal Democrats join together.

So we're seeing the NDP working with the Liberals and we can see they have the same philosophy.

We've been clear, Speaker. The Liberals just don't get it. Here we are the first day, day one back after being away from here for months, and the Liberals want to spend \$160 million, and the number \$411 billion is staring at us. I mean, it's shameful. Each year, we're spending billions of dollars more on interest payments. It's just despicable. We have a debt crisis in the province; by 2017 it's going to put us in the league of Greece and Portugal. And of course, we have a jobs crisis. Bill 11 will not do anything to help the 600,000 men and women without work.

Our party has a clear plan. Let's reform the apprenticeship system, let's get hydro rates under control, and let's slash the government regulations and red tape that are not allowing private sector growth in the province of Ontario.

Again, Speaker, I thank you for the time, and I hope everyone will support our party in this initiative.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to 10:15 of the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1011 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. It is time for us to get back to work in the House. I do want to welcome everyone back, including all of our guests, but I also want to say to the members here, thank you for the work that you've done in your constituency offices during this time when the House isn't sitting. To make sure everyone understands, you are a very hard-working group of people on behalf of the citizens of Ontario, and I thank you so much for doing that.

Now I would like to offer you time for introduction of guests.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please help me in introducing a councillor from the town of Orangeville and the proud parent of page Patrick, Jeremy Williams.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am actually making this introduction on behalf of the member for Simcoe North as well, because we share an interest in these constituents: Janet MacDougall, who is actually the executive director of Yes I Can! Nursery School in my riding, Marnie MacDougall, Janet's daughter, and Michael Hawkins, Janet's son-in-law. Welcome.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Joining us today in the east members' gallery, I'd like to welcome Oakville residents Richard and Pat Gorwill. They're here to see their granddaughter Katie on her first day as a page.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Good morning. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Anne Newman and Victor Newman to the Ontario Legislature today. They are the grandparents of page James Newman from Scarborough-Guildwood.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would like to welcome in the members' east gallery Mr. Chris Watson, here from the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? There being none, it's now time for oral questions.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Just in time. The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to introduce Colleen Hochgeschurz from my riding of Carleton-Mississippi Mills. She's here today to see her daughter Katelyn Hochgeschurz, who is on her first day as a page.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now I will call upon the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, today the Legislature is returning after a considerable break in the shadow of another eHealth-style spending scandal at Ornge, the air ambulance service, and we also are returning with the government seemingly paralyzed in the face of a growing debt crisis in the province of Ontario.

The Drummond report, which is supposed to be your silver bullet to address all the spending problems, was released last week, but you've not indicated a single measure that you will implement. Premier, of the entire 700 pages, which recommendations will you actually implement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. I want to take the opportunity as well to thank Don Drummond and the other commissioners for the very important work that they've done.

Speaker, as you know, this report flows from a directive we put in last year's budget. We anticipated the need for some profound changes, not only in terms of individual programs but also in terms of how government goes about its work. I think it's very important that, in the coming days and weeks, we understand that we can and should engage in the best way for us to balance that budget, but we cannot debate—I certainly am not prepared to debate—our shared objective, which is surely to ensure that we balance the budget by 2017-18, ensure that government is more affordable and that we improve the quality of services. I believe that we can in fact achieve that destination by working together.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary question?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, here's the concern that the Ontario PCs have and that Ontario taxpayers have: We're worried about this troubling paralysis on the government

side when it comes to addressing the growing debt crisis in Ontario. Let me tell you why I say that.

The deficit is actually up, not down. While you say you're going to control spending, spending has actually gone up in every government ministry except two since last year, and since the election, you've announced an additional \$2.5 billion in expenditures and no savings to match them. Premier, we're worried that you actually haven't learned the lesson from the last election, which indicated that we need to get spending under control.

Let me ask you this: You've had the Drummond report for some time, I believe. You've been briefed all along. When will we actually see your plan to balance the books and get spending under control in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to speak to the issue that is raised by my honourable colleague about spending. I think it's important to reference the Drummond report. I'll quote from a specific passage, where the commission says:

"Spending is neither out of control nor wildly excessive. Ontario runs one of the lowest-cost provincial governments in Canada relative to its GDP and has done so for decades." He goes on to say, "And we must recognize that some important steps have been taken in the past few years to help manage costs, improve our prospects for future economic growth and enhance services to the public."

I say to my honourable colleague and to all members of the opposition that our shared responsibility now is to debate the best way for us to move forward together. Any responsible advice that my colleague would care to offer in that regard would be gratefully received.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, Speaker, a very troubling response by the Premier. The Drummond report gives 362 failing grades to the Liberal government; 362 ways to reduce spending. He says that if we don't act today, we'll face a \$30-billion deficit, not a balanced budget, as you promised, in 2017, and you're en route to almost tripling the debt—and the Premier pats himself on the back for controlling spending? Just how out of touch is that response, Premier?

Let me ask you again, because I'm troubled by your response that says you're doing a good job when the report says the opposite: Can you tell me one thing from the Drummond report—just one thing, Premier—that you actually will implement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we're very pleased with the work done by the Drummond commission. I think it is exceptionally thorough. I think it's the most thorough set of recommendations of its kind, I would venture to say, in the history of our country.

I've made it clear, Speaker, that while the commission's responsibility is to provide us with advice, our job in government is, of course, to make the final decisions. We will incorporate the recommendations made by the Drummond commission in our budget, but before that

point in time, of course, we're looking to the advice of our honourable colleagues opposite in opposition. We look forward to hearing from Ontarians. The Minister of Finance will consider his pre-budget consultations, and we hope that there will be a legislative committee that will take a closer look, as well, at the Drummond commission. All those opportunities will, I'm sure, provide us with even better advice with respect to the best way to move forward, and we look forward to doing that.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Premier, you describe the Drummond report as "thorough." I won't argue with that. But your response is anything but thorough. Your response has been vacuous to date. There has been an absence of leadership, despite the fact that I believe you've had the Drummond report on your desk probably for five or six weeks. The report was made public yesterday.

Let me tell you the problem: Every hour of every day, we're spending \$1.8 million more than we have in revenue. So, to date, since the Drummond report has come out, Speaker, we're up another \$250 million in debt, because there has been no action.

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Premier, waiting until the end of March is not good enough. We're in a big hole. The first rule when you're in a hole is you stop digging. Premier, will you bring the budget forward? Will you act sooner, or do we have to actually wait—are you telling us—until the end of March for you to shake off your paralysis in ending your runaway spending?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate my honourable colleague's impatience, but I'm not going to be providing a list of which of the 362 we support and which we don't.

But I would appreciate hearing from the opposition, Speaker, to provide us with important advice that will help shape our budget, as to which of the recommendations they support and which of the recommendations they don't support. Our responsibility at this point in time is to continue to listen, to get a reaction to this report from both the opposition and from Ontarians themselves, and to incorporate that information and that advice into our budget. We're on track to doing that, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, with all due respect, people want to see leadership; they want to see action. Crunch time has come, and they expect something more than the Premier once again punting this down the road. We've waited practically a year since you appointed Mr. Drummond. You've had the report for six weeks.

Let me ask the Premier this. You've told us what you're not going to do on his recommendation: You said you're going to go full steam with full-day kindergarten at a cost of \$1.5 billion a year. Mr. Drummond says that if you take something out of his equation, you have to put

something back on the table. So I ask you, Premier, if you're going to add \$1.5 billion on to the tab, what else will you put on the table? Where will you find the savings to make up for that additional \$1.5 billion?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, full-day kindergarten is not a matter of political convenience for us on this side of the House; it's a matter of conviction. I draw an important distinction between convenience and conviction.

We will find a way. This is a good example of the value set that we are bringing to the choices before us. One of the things that the Drummond commission reinforces over and over again is that it's important to establish as a priority those things that invest in the future. There are all kinds of stakeholders for the present but not so many when it comes to representing the future. That's our responsibility here, so we are absolutely wed to full-day kindergarten and the plan as originally put forward.

We will find other ways, Speaker—and we look forward to hearing from the opposition in this regard as well—to find savings to allow for that. But, again, it's all about making choices, choices informed by our values.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, what's also troubling is that within 24 hours of the Drummond report, DBRS, the bond rating agency, put out a warning calling for action. They're worried about the lack of resolve. They say, "The strategy fleshed out to date continues to lack details," and at best your results have been mixed. This is dangerous, because the higher our bond rating, the more expensive debt becomes in the province, taking money away from health and education.

Premier, you've added on \$1.5 billion to the equation from full-day kindergarten, and you've announced \$2.5 billion in new initiatives. Let me ask you this. Your tax credit for tuition for college and university is an additional \$500 million or so. Is that off the table as well, or will you consider getting rid of that program to meet Mr. Drummond's recommendations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it's no secret my honourable colleague wants to increase tuition in Ontario, and we look forward to considering the plan in a full way through the budget.

But we have done a few things, and I would be interested in getting the response of our opposition to this. The Minister of Finance has announced that we're going to be selling LCBO prime real estate in downtown Toronto because that's not a good investment of public dollars, we are going to be enhancing privatization over at ServiceOntario, and we are going to seriously consider ending our subsidies for the horse racing industry.

I know we've heard from some in the opposition who are adamantly opposed to some of those provisions, but those are things that we think are important for us to consider. Again, if we're going to establish as a priority health care and education, those are the kinds of choices

we have to make, and I would love to hear where the opposition stands on those kinds of choices.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. During last fall's election campaign, the Premier insisted that his no-strings-attached corporate tax giveaways wouldn't be breaking the bank; now he claims that Ontario is struggling to make ends meet. The Premier insisted he had a jobs plan, but Ontario families watched as bad strategy led to good jobs being lost in communities across the province, most recently in London; brutal layoffs all the way around. My question is a simple one: Does the Premier actually think his plan is working?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, Speaker, I welcome the question from my honourable colleague. It's good for us to be back and to be debating a very important issue at a very important time of consequence to the future of our province.

One of the things that I would recommend to my honourable colleague is, again, if she takes a look at the Drummond commission and the report itself, it specifically commends our government and, I think, Ontarians more generally, for the important work we have done, for example, to ensure that we have a competitive tax environment. We have done a great deal working together, reducing both personal income taxes, corporate taxes, eliminating capital taxes and helping small businesses as well. He also specifically commends the work Ontarians have done to ensure that we now have one of the most competitive workforces anywhere in the world.

Those are two important parts of the foundation for growth and prosperity that we intend to build upon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, one thing is certainly consistent, and that is that, during the campaign and afterwards, the Premier has avoided the people who will be affected by the government's broken promises. Whether it's campaigning in a bubble or playing political games that blocked committees for months, people in this province are once again being ignored.

The Premier heard from his favourite experts. When will he actually listen to the people who end up paying those higher electricity bills, the people who end up coping with longer wait times, the people who end up having to deal with children who have larger classroom sizes and a more difficult time learning because of it—all for the purposes of paying for this Premier's corporate tax giveaways?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's an important time for all of us because it's an opportunity for us to give expression to the fundamental values that inform our idea of public service. As we go through these recommendations to be found within the commission's report, for example, as we hear from the opposition parties and from Ontarians generally, we're going to do everything we possibly can to: give priority to good-quality health care; the best possible schools in the world—that is our ambition in

that regard; ensure that we achieve a sustainable balance by 2017-18, one that will continue for a long time into the future; and ensure that our public services are both affordable and of a higher quality. That's the ideal that we share and that's the goal we have set for ourselves, and obviously, of course, that involves listening to people.

My honourable colleague may know that I was in London a short while ago, before we got the terrible news about Caterpillar, to meet with some of the workers there and see what it is that we might do working together.

But we're not giving up our economy. I know that my honourable colleague will give us advice in terms of how we need to respond more specifically.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People in communities across Ontario are watching good jobs vanish. They were told that the HST and corporate tax giveaways were going to create jobs in Ontario. Instead, those people are being told that they can expect less from their government, and jobs like those at Caterpillar in London continue to walk out the door. My question again to the Premier is: Does he really believe that his plan is working, or is he willing to admit that in fact it's a failure?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Every once in a while, as I like to say, facts are helpful. Since the recession, Ontario has created over 303,000 new jobs, so we are ahead of where we used to be. Last year, we created over 121,000 new jobs in Ontario. We continue to remain the second-best place in all of North America as a recipient of foreign direct investment. We're first by far in Canada, but in North America, first it's California and then it's Ontario.

I think that one of the reasons we are there is, of course, the competitiveness of our tax environment that we have put in place. When I was in Kitchener-Waterloo just a few weeks ago and met with the folks there representing Google, who are expanding there on a second occasion, they were saying over and over again that it is the skill set of our workers that is drawing foreign direct investment to Ontario; hence, Speaker, our commitment to things like full-day kindergarten.

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AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My second question is also to the Premier. In 2010, New Democrats raised serious concerns about the abuse of public money at Ornge. Does the Premier feel that the minister took swift and appropriate action?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to begin by commending the minister for moving so decisively in terms of dealing with a very important issue of public policy and public dollars. The minister has demonstrated, I think, a real determination and conviction in dealing with these issues.

At the outset, I want to begin by acknowledging the very important work being done by the front-line workers

at Ornge, our air ambulance service. These include paramedics and pilots. Last year alone they were involved in over 19,000 patient transports, and throughout all of this upheaval in their organization they have remained absolutely committed and devoted to delivering the best possible care to Ontarians. I think it's important that together we acknowledge their unrelenting commitment to good-quality care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, commend the minister if he will, but in November 2010—over a year ago—the minister couldn't explain why Ornge was exempted from salary disclosure rules. The minister said, "We'll do the work required to get answers."

Now, over a year later, when the details of serious problems at Ornge broke in the news, we discovered that, in fact, nothing had changed, and the minister was again looking for answers. Now, I'm curious, and I'm sure the people of Ontario are curious, Speaker: What exactly happened during that lost year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Last year, as you will know, Speaker, the minister asked for a forensic audit to determine how public money was being spent. The audit uncovered financial irregularities. That information has been provided to the Ontario Provincial Police. The police are now investigating this matter and we look forward to the results of that investigation. Should the police determine that public money was in fact misspent, our government will take any and all necessary steps to recover those dollars.

In the meantime, the minister, as I say, has acted decisively. She has replaced the president; she has replaced the board of directors; she has put a stop to all for-profit activities; and she's co-operating in a full way with the province's Auditor General. I think that's exactly what's in keeping with the public interest at this point in time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this government set up Ornge. Well-connected Liberals were paid generously to help hammer out the details of the setting-up of Ornge. In January 2011, staff in the Premier's office met with Ornge officials and their lawyer, the former president of the Liberal Party of Canada, and they were all fully briefed—fully briefed—on the schemes at Ornge.

The Premier knew the details, Speaker. He and his minister spent a year avoiding questions, avoiding tough questions. Now do they really think, and does he really think, that anybody believes their claims of surprise today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I expect that in the coming days, and possibly even weeks, these kinds of allegations will be floated in and about with respect to partisan involvement in this matter. Fortunately, Speaker, there is an Auditor General who will look at this. I recall the same kinds of allegations being made at the time of eHealth, and the Auditor General spoke to that in a very decisive and finalizing type of way.

The other thing I want to say, because I know Ontarians are interested in this, is that the minister will shortly introduce legislation to strengthen our government's oversight. The new rules will include a new strict performance agreement, the strict monitoring of finances, a new patient advocate and linking executive pay to quality improvements. Again, I think that speaks to the decisive approach being brought by the Minister of Health.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Health: Speaker, front-line workers at Ontario's air ambulance service have lost confidence in the Minister of Health. Paramedics, flight crews, dispatchers and support staff have watched as their once proud and efficient emergency service was turned into a playground for a handful of political friends. Millions of dollars were wasted, operational standards were compromised, and the lives of patients and crews were put at risk, all under the watch of a minister who refused opposition warnings and allowed the waste of precious health care dollars to continue, only to be forced into calling a criminal investigation.

Speaker, on behalf of those front-line health care workers, patients whose lives have been put at risk and the public who have lost confidence in this minister, I ask the minister, will she do the honourable thing? Will she accept responsibility for the scandalous mess at Ornge and resign?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

What I think is important—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are going to be some important questions coming up, and it sounds like there's some intense emotion here. I'm going to ask—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And if I hear one more interruption when I'm speaking, you'll be gone.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And you.

I demand your attention.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for the question.

I want to begin by saying thank you to the front-line workers that the member opposite has referred to. Speaker, there are 600 employees at Ornge who, every single day, come to work in order to provide the best possible care for the people they serve. I'm talking about paramedics, I'm talking about pilots, I'm talking about doctors, I'm talking about the people who maintain the aircraft.

Ornge provides a vitally important service to the people of this province, and I want to say thank you to the front-line staff who have endured difficult, difficult

weeks, because I tell you, they are doing everything they can in their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the minister admitted that she failed in her oversight responsibilities of Ontario's air ambulance services here at the Legislature on Friday. Forensic audits and investigations have forced the minister to order a criminal investigation. The minister admits that she was briefed on the details of the very agreement that gave carte blanche to the masterminds of the self-serving schemes of Ornge in January of last year. She did nothing to stop that. Now, rather than accept responsibility, she wants to feign ignorance. She claims that she was lied to by senior advisers and wants to now hide behind the veil of a criminal investigation.

We submit that by not stepping aside, the minister is limiting the scope of the very criminal investigation she has ordered, because we believe that the scope of that investigation should lead to her office and her staff and herself.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the member opposite is making a very serious, outrageous and untrue allegation, and I am asking the member opposite to withdraw that allegation, because I can assure you that the Ontario Provincial Police do not take orders from me or any of my colleagues. They will do exactly the investigation that they want to do, completely unencumbered by any political direction, and if the member opposite is suggesting otherwise, I am asking him to withdraw that allegation right now.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. It will be very brief. Can the minister tell this House when she first learned of the exorbitant executive salaries and the for-profit arrangement at Ornge, Ontario's air ambulance service?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, Speaker, in fact I can, and I thank the member for the question. As you will recall, when we were last here there were questions around that issue. We were not able to get the answers from Ornge. The Auditor General was unable to get answers to the questions he was asking. My ministry officials were unable to get answers. That is why I had a meeting in my boardroom with the senior executives at Ornge and I told them—this meeting was in December—that I expected them to answer the questions that were being asked by the Auditor General and by the ministry. Only a few days later, we did receive information from Ornge on what the compensation for the senior management at Ornge was. The number—particularly for the president and CEO—was outrageous, exorbitant and completely unacceptable, which is why I sent in the forensic audit team. As we all know, that has led to an OPP investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France G  linas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From this side of the House, there seems to be a two-year delay between acting disturbed and outraged and what really happened. In estimates in 2010, the NDP asked the minister a question about the salaries and about the for-profit services at Ornge, and the minister promised that she would get back to the NDP. But she didn't. Only when these stories were on the front pages of the papers and all over the television sets did she then react. I ask again: When did you first hear about extravagant salaries at Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the answer remains the same. It was in late December when I finally did get answers. In the meantime, the Auditor General was doing an audit of Ornge. I asked anyone who had information to submit that information either through me to the Auditor General or directly to the Auditor General. To the best of my knowledge, none of the members opposite, even though one in particular stood up with allegations—did not substantiate that. To the best of my knowledge, that information was not passed on to the Auditor General. I wanted to let the Auditor General do his job. I did not want to leap to further action. But when the Auditor General told me he was not getting answers to questions he was asking, that is when I took action. That was in December. In the meantime, we have a completely new leadership at Ornge, a new interim CEO and a new board. We are working on a new performance agreement with Ornge.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: There has been a lot of talk about economic recovery and growth in Ontario, but it is unclear about how certain regions are faring. While the government has identified southwestern, eastern and northern Ontario as priority areas for strategic job investments, little is said about what's being done to create jobs in the greater Toronto area, including my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and stretching as far as the municipalities of Clarington and Durham. My question to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is: What is happening in employment markets in the GTA to create jobs and bring investments?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's great to see the member for Pickering–Scarborough East back on her feet and it's great to see her so soon back in the game. Great to have you back.

I know that the member has been very involved promoting growth in the GTA, and Durham in particular. We've invested in 47 economic projects throughout the GTA, leveraging over \$3.5 billion in private sector investment. That has created or protected 11,300 jobs in the GTA. These projects include investments in companies like Electrovaya, Pride Pak and Magellan in Peel; General Electric, Axiom Group and Inteva in York region; ASC Signal and ProPharma in Durham; and Dana and Fifth Light Technologies in Cambridge and Oakville.

When you consider the huge economic impact of these investments and then you consider the investments we're making in places like Durham in energy and infrastructure, I have little doubt that the GTA will continue to help lead our recovery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer. The folks in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and all Ontarians are encouraged to hear the positive results that we're seeing from these investments that we've made in the GTA to create and sustain jobs. There's no doubt that the GTA is vital to the economic vitality of the Ontario economy, but it would be helpful to hear, Minister, what others are saying outside of government about our plan.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to share with the member that many experts outside of government are recognizing the progress we're making.

According to the latest CIBC Canadian Metropolitan Economic Activity Index, which was just released in January, Toronto was ranked number one for the second time in a row with the greatest economic momentum. In fact, let me quote directly from the report. It says this: "While the recession saw the city losing ground faster than the rest of the country's ... CMAs, its recovery trajectory has been much more impressive with the city's index of economic momentum currently at its highest level in more than 10 years."

Since 2009, employment in Toronto has grown 4.6%. That's well above the national average, with full-time employment accounting for the majority of that.

While there's more work to do and we're eager to get on with it, the fact is we're on the right track despite the challenges of an uncertain global economy.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Health. Speaker, the minister continues to refuse to accept responsibility for the scandalous abuse of tax dollars at Ontario's air ambulance service. She claims that she either didn't know or that she was lied to. We accept neither of those excuses and neither does the public.

The fact is that the minister ignored repeated warnings from opposition members and she ignored warnings written to her by front-line employees of Ornge and stakeholders. Now, we know that the only reason this has been exposed is because of whistleblowers who are either current or former employees of Ornge. The latest: The new management installed by the minister has now told the whistleblowers to stop talking or risk going to jail. That the minister would condone that is unconscionable.

I call on the minister once again, on behalf of those front-line health care workers who want to tell the truth about what is going on there—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I remind all members: When I stand, you sit.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Just to be clear, I am not resigning. I have got a lot of work to do on the transformation of our health care system. We have important work to do to make sure that our health care system meets the needs of people not just today but in the future, so I'm not going anywhere.

What I can tell you, though, is that whenever a warning was made, my ministry officials did look into those concerns.

I do want to say, though, to the member opposite, he has stood up in this House repeatedly, and elsewhere as well, saying that he has inside information, and to the best of my knowledge, he has not shared that inside information. I'm asking him today, are you going to share that information?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that any information that I have, she already has had and has done nothing with it.

I can also share with the House that I have transferred all of the information that I've received to the Auditor General. And I can also share with you that the reason the Auditor General has delayed his report is because of that additional information.

What I will say to the minister is that to threaten existing employees of Ornge with jail time if they share their concerns is unconscionable and it speaks to the fact that this government is more intent on covering up what is going on there rather than getting to the bottom of it. It's for that reason that I call on the minister to resign because she is not showing leadership. In fact, what she's doing is adding to the cover-up of something that quite frankly is—

Interjections.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That exchange led me to the point where I was going to stand anyway, but the first part that was said was very on the edge. The last part was not acceptable and the member will withdraw.

Mr. Frank Klees: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we want to thank the people who did actually bring irregularities to light. It is thanks to people who work at Ornge that we do have the information we need to take the extraordinary step of calling in the OPP, and Ornge will be implementing a whistleblower policy to further protect anyone who does share concerns that they have.

So, Speaker, what I really think it's important to do is that we let the police investigation continue. It is very important to me and to all of the people who work at Ornge that justice be done. There are serious allegations; there is a serious investigation underway. I can assure the member opposite and anyone else that my ministry is co-operating fully, that we have co-operated fully with the Auditor General, that the forensic audit team is giving everything they have collected to the criminal investigation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To the Premier: At a time when thousands of Ontarians are in dire need of government support, the Drummond report made the dubious recommendation that Ontario should nix job creation as a priority. These are Drummond's exact words in recommendation 11-3: "Refocus the mandate of business support programs from job creation to productivity growth in the private sector."

With 600,000 Ontarians out of work, we need a job creation strategy. Will the Premier reject this recommendation or will he give up on good jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question.

Like all the Drummond recommendations, we're taking a very serious look at each and every one of them. The Minister of Finance, in his budget, will be coming forward this spring with, I think, a very thorough report of those recommendations that we're going to accept. So I think the Premier was very clear on that. We will make the decisions, ultimately.

There's no question, though: Across this province we've worked very hard to put in place very strong fundamentals to build a strong economy, and Mr. Drummond is very cognizant of that. Whether it be the improvements we've made to education, whether it's been the investments we've made in infrastructure, whether it's been the energy system that we've now made very, very safe, secure and stable, whether, Mr. Speaker, it's investments we've made in innovation, all of those things are the fundamentals to build a strong economy.

But I do agree, Mr. Speaker: We want—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, I didn't hear much of an answer, except, "We will consider all these recommendations."

Look, productivity is important; we recognize that. But with 600,000 Ontarians out of work, our focus should be on creating good jobs. Without good-paying jobs, there is no prosperity: the kinds of jobs that once made this a middle-class province, the kinds of jobs that have been disappearing under the McGuinty government at an alarming rate.

Will this government make job creation a priority or is it throwing in the towel on the middle class in this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, job creation is our top priority and it always has been. That's why, in the face of very challenging global economics, we've been able to increase the number of jobs in this province last year by 121,300 net new jobs.

We have it going in the right direction, but we're not satisfied with that. We're going to keep building on those strong fundamentals that we have in this province. We're going to keep creating jobs, Mr. Speaker. We're going to keep ensuring that our private sector steps up now with those strong fundamentals and improves the productivity that we want to continue to improve on.

Mr. Drummond makes some good points in that report, Mr. Speaker. We're going to take a very close look at those recommendations, and we'll do what any responsible government will do and do what's in the best interest of the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

Minister, many people take for granted the wires and poles of our electricity system. These vital components of our electricity infrastructure ensure that Ontario families, farms and small businesses have the power they need when they flip the switch. It was not too long ago that our government inherited an electricity system that was on the brink of collapse. For many years, previous governments wilfully neglected investments in our electricity system, putting reliability at risk. In fact, the Hydro One line to Guelph is 100 years old. I didn't even know they made steel lattice towers that long ago.

Over the last eight years, Ontario families have had to do the work that others failed to do. Minister, what investments have been made to restore the dirty, outdated and unreliable electricity system we inherited in 2003?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As usual, the member from Guelph has gone to the heart of the matter: We need a reliable, clean, modern system that's fit for what families, farms and businesses actually require day to day.

So those same families, farms and businesses have been doing a lot of work the last eight years. Unfortunately, they've had to do some work that should have been done before the last eight years, and so they've spent almost three times as much money constructing 5,000 additional kilometres of new wire, redoing transformers, upgrading stations, all to make sure that when you flip the switch on, the power comes on; when you need the heat, the heat's there.

When you need to rely on it for your farm, your milking operation, your household, your business manufacturing operation, the power that you need is there when you need it, thanks to Ontario farms, families and businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I know my constituents appreciate the hard work that has been done to restore reliability in the province. As a government agency and Ontario's largest local distribution company, Hydro One plays an important role in maintaining the safety and reliability of our electricity system. The work they do keeps the lights on in our homes.

As a government, to ensure that our electricity system stays strong and vibrant in the future, we need to make the necessary investments in the grid and the necessary investments in the electrical workers of tomorrow. These young people will find employment in our clean energy economy and will be responsible for Ontario's energy future.

Minister, what is being done by Hydro One to ensure that the electrical workers of tomorrow have every opportunity to participate and succeed in the energy economy?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, that's the natural extension of the first part. The other week, I was up at the Hydro One grid control centre, right next to Georgian College in Barrie, and you know what—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Great spot.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: And from that spot, they control 150,000 kilometres of the transmission and distribution centre covering the province of Ontario. They're able to make sure that the farms, families and businesses get the power they need. They identify the issues and then dispatch those very highly skilled workers to repair or to upgrade and renew issues. And they're working with Georgian and other colleges around the province to give students internships, co-op placements, to make sure the students get an opportunity for great jobs in the province and our transmission and distribution centre has the appropriately trained workers to make sure we have a clean, reliable, modern system fit for the people of Ontario.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Education. Both on January 11 and February 1, I asked you to release Coulter Osborne's report on school busing. I know the minister has received this report, and I know it contains recommendations on the RFP process that has forced small businesses in many of our communities to stop their school bus routes. Last week, Don Drummond's report recommended the moratorium on the RFP process be lifted as soon as possible.

Minister, is the reason you're keeping the Osborne report secret because it cautions against monopolies in school busing and conflicts with Drummond's report?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I know that for many parents like myself and like the member opposite, perhaps, the school day begins the moment we put our kids on the bus. We know that that is so critically important: that our bus system and our school transportation system be safe, efficient and accountable. We know that school boards and operators share that goal with us. So, yes, I want to thank the task force for their efforts to study what is a very complex issue and to look at the many competing interests and needs.

I want you to know that I really appreciate the sector's support of the task force and the work and advice that they've given. I am currently reviewing the report and its recommendations, and it will provide guidance as we

make decisions, moving forward, on such a critically important issue.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She's had the Osborne report for a month, and she's still reviewing it. Meanwhile, the school boards and consortiums have already gone out to tender.

I have a quick question for the minister. You saw the Osborne and Drummond reports before anyone else in the education sector. You've strung small independent operators along for months now. Why are you hiding the Osborne report? Does it conflict with Drummond, and does it caution you against creating monopolies like Ornge in the bus sector?

Hon. Laurel Broten: I think the complexity of the issue is evident from the member opposite's question. Her leader has said that their party would implement the entirety of Don Drummond's report. At the same time, we hear a query with respect to what advice we have gotten from another group of experts led by Coulter Osborne who brought together a group of diverse interests to give us some advice. It's incumbent upon me, as the minister, to take that advice and examine it in the context of how we ensure that public education—that starts when you put your kids on the bus—is safe and efficient and accountable as well.

That's what we are doing: We're taking a look at the report. Unlike the members opposite, we won't move aggressively and immediately without examining the facts and the circumstances and taking that advice and reflecting upon it.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, to the Premier: Caterpillar's actions in London have demonstrated an unprecedented level of corporate greed. Their refusal to negotiate, their demand for massive pay cuts and their decision to ship jobs south disgust people throughout the province and makes them wonder whether it could happen to them.

To make sure this doesn't happen again to any family, will the Premier agree to strike a commission into Caterpillar under section 37 of the Labour Relations Act?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I appreciate the advice of the member opposite, but what I would say is this—there are really three things, I think, that need to be said in response to that question. The first is that our concern is and will always be the workers who are there. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities was there, on the spot, within hours of that unfortunate announcement being made.

Secondly, we can't let these occurrences dampen our determination to continue to build a strong economy in Ontario. That has got to be job number one. The fact is,

we did create 121,300 net jobs last year in the province of Ontario.

Thirdly, I want to thank the third party and the leader of the third party, and I want to thank the Premier, for standing up for those workers in London. I do have to ask where the Leader of the Opposition was on this, because he has been asked numerous times: Will he stand with those workers or will he not? Mr. Speaker, he has refused to answer that question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's pretty clear that the Premier's no-strings-attached corporate tax giveaways aren't working, and neither is his lack of action. Several columnists have noted that the Premier didn't even pick up the phone to the company or the Prime Minister.

The province needs to act to secure jobs in this province by rewarding companies that create good jobs, strengthening labour laws and bringing in a buy-Ontario program. What is the Premier's plan?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think it's really important that, as we sympathize with the challenges that these workers are going through, what they expect of us is to ensure that the supports are there for those workers as they go through this transition.

The other thing that they would expect of us is to continue to work diligently to create jobs in that part of the province. That's why our southwestern Ontario development fund is so important. So I ask the members opposite—I ask the members of the NDP, and I ask the members of the PC Party—to give very good consideration to supporting what is a very important piece of legislation that's going to create jobs in southwestern Ontario. I know the people of London are looking forward to that fund being approved in this Legislature, and I hope I can count on the members opposite to support that.

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. On January 18, a terrible tragedy occurred on Highway 3 in Windsor. A tow truck driver was hit and killed while helping another motorist change a tire. It was daytime, weather conditions were normal, the driver was well-trained and their amber lights were flashing.

Speaker, through you, my question to the minister is: What do drivers need to know when encountering roadside assistance vehicles, or any vehicle for that matter, on the road in distress so that these types of tragedies can be avoided?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Windsor West for asking this question, and I certainly share her concerns about this tragedy.

We are looking at everything we know so far about the circumstances. There certainly aren't many answers to the question of why this actually happened. The driver of the vehicle is facing charges, and through that process we may learn more about what actually transpired in those

few seconds. But this is a stark reminder of the care that needs to be taken by every single driver every time they get behind the wheel, because things can happen in an instant when care is not taken.

When you see any vehicle in distress on the side of the road, be mindful of the fact that there may be people moving around the outside of that vehicle. That's just common sense. Being alert, cognizant and considerate of road users is the best way to keep roads safe for people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister. I spend quite a bit of time on the roads and highways in and around Windsor and around here, and I can tell you that there's no substitute in terms of safety for being alert and being aware of what's going on around you at all times.

Every day, more than 1,000 tow truck operators take to the roads in Ontario, helping drivers in sometimes very difficult and dangerous conditions. It is a unique industry and certainly one that provides an important service to Ontario drivers.

Speaker, can the minister acknowledge that, moving forward, he will consider appropriate measures to strengthen this industry, whose members are there to help us day and night?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, once again, I share the member's concerns. Absolutely. I am always open to thoughtful ideas on how to strengthen standards in this industry, because, as the member noted, it has a significant presence on our roads and highways.

I recall that the member for Willowdale had a bill before the House last spring much to that effect that I was supportive of.

I think it's an important discussion to have, but it's important that the discussion be broad-based, looks at the industry as a whole and takes into account the inputs of the police, the CAA and other stakeholders.

Ontario consistently has the safest roads in North America. Statistics always show this to be the case. But unfortunately, driver error remains the number one cause of fatal conditions on the roads.

The member is right: There is no legislation or regulation that will ever substitute for alert and defensive driving. This is something for all drivers to remember before heading out onto the road.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. There's something terribly problematic with the Pan Am tendering in Hamilton. It starts at the top of the Liberal-appointed Pan Am organizing committee and board, who turn a blind eye to the broken tendering process, which the city of Hamilton is complaining favours the Working Families Coalition unions. The nepotism for the Working Families Coalition unions effectively shrinks the competition by 75%, which drives costs up—up to 40% higher.

What makes the government feel entitled to make the hard-earned money of the hard-working Ontario tax-

payers finance their cheap political advertisers with inflated bids?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Pan Am Games coming to Ontario. The fact of the matter is, we're going to be able to host a game of up to 10,000 athletes—the largest set of games ever hosted by the province of Ontario. It's going to bring for us a number of great legacies, including economic development: over 15,000 new jobs in the province. It's also going to help athleticism and elite athletes now be able to train and perform within the jurisdiction of Ontario, as well as helping many social and community groups.

In regards to his question and the insinuations made, I congratulate Infrastructure Ontario for the outstanding work they've done with tendering the process of all the venues that have been brought forward. We are trying our best to maintain the lowest and best price possible for the delivery of these games, and we look forward to seeing them come in 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?
1130

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, how can the minister justify millions of wasted dollars lining the pockets of their union friends on the backs of taxpayers? Indeed, this legislated nepotism in the tendering process costs the city of Hamilton about \$4 million to \$10 million in additional dollars per year in inflated construction bids.

Here is what's wrong: accountability. The Liberal Pan Am organizing committee and board report to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of Infrastructure has Infrastructure Ontario managing Pan Am projects, and the Minister of Sport is undefined in this role. Which one of you ministers will stand up and explain to the city of Hamilton and Ontario taxpayers why you're turning a blind eye to tolerate nepotism in the tendering process costing the city and Ontario taxpayers millions of dollars annually?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, just by the amount of RFPs that are out there, the proponents that are being awarded would indicate otherwise. The fact of the matter is we are providing an open and transparent process. It's in the midst of going through that right now. We need to ensure we get the best possible price for the taxpayers in delivering these games, and I'm very confident that we are doing exactly what the delivery of these games will bring to Ontario as a result of the great work that Infrastructure Ontario is providing.

I should also state that until this point, we have only spent 3% of the entire budget of \$1.4 billion. We need to take every precautionary step possible to ensure that we deliver the games on time and on budget.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As I'm sure you're aware, prescription drug abuse is an epidemic in northern communities. In my riding, the community of Cat Lake

has declared a state of emergency as a result of prescription drug abuse. Other First Nations communities report addiction rates as high as 50% to 70%.

On Friday, it was announced that OxyContin will no longer be available in Canada. While this should help prevent further addiction, it does little to help those who are currently addicted. What is this government's plan, and does this government have a strategy to assist First Nations communities struggling with staggering rates of addiction?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite. She has raised a very, very important question. I think members of this House know that the issue of prescription drug abuse, and particularly OxyContin, is one that has taken a significant amount of my personal time, because I do know that we've got a lot of work to do.

We know that OxyContin will no longer be manufactured by Purdue pharmaceutical and that there is a new drug that is far less likely to be used for illicit purposes, Speaker. We do have an issue that we are working to address.

The federal government, of course, is responsible for delivering health care in those First Nations communities. But this is an issue of concern, and I want to assure the member opposite that we are looking into it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: First Nations communities have been asking for help for years, but their requests have fallen on deaf ears. Minister, First Nations people are the citizens of this province, and they're crying out for help. Leaders in the north are terrified about what may happen if entire communities are forced to go off the drug cold turkey. Time is of the essence. When will this government release a comprehensive plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we released our addictions and mental health strategy several months ago. Part of that strategy is dealing with this addiction to prescription narcotics. There is much, much work to be done—I am very well aware of that—and I want you to know that we are very much focused on this issue.

FOREST INDUSTRY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for—sorry.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: The best for last. Thank you, Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, a new program has been designed to encourage Ontarians to buy locally when thinking about purchasing wood products, and while it's still in its initial stages, Ontarians will soon be able to identify the origins of the wood they are buying at their local hardware or furniture store because of the new Ontario Wood logo that will help spot homegrown wood products. The Ontario Wood

logo builds on the success of Foodland Ontario, the logo before it, which is used by over 300 companies and food processors in Ontario.

I know that the Ontario wood logo will receive similar uptake and is yet another step that our government is taking in order to restore the competitiveness of Ontario's forestry sector. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can the minister inform the members of this House how this new initiative will create jobs for Ontarians?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly want to thank the member for bringing our new Ontario Wood logo to the attention of the House and all Ontarians.

The Ontario Wood initiative is yet another part of our plan to create jobs in the forestry sector and strengthen the Ontario economy. An Ontario Wood logo will encourage Ontario families to think about where the wood products they buy come from. From lumber to furniture, Ontarians will be able to identify made-in-Ontario wood, allowing them to buy locally and help keep jobs in communities across Ontario—and I can tell you, Speaker, we know that Ontarians, if they have an opportunity to buy locally, Ontario-made wood, that's what they would like to do.

Certainly, I want to thank the Ontario Forest Industries Association, the OFIA, for their support and being the first licensed user of the Ontario Wood logo. Certainly, it is strong partnerships with industry members that will drive the success of this program and consumers around the world to choose made-in-Ontario wood. We're very proud of it, Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back, by the way.

I'm delighted to introduce the Trans Lobby Group. We have with us some incredible advocates: Susan Gapka, Doug Arcand, Stefonknee Wolscht, Martine Stonehouse, Davina Hader, Georgina Bencsik, Christin Milloy and Nicole Nussbaum. So, welcome all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Kathy Argiropoulos, Maria Daskalos, Jim Parthenis, Christine Theolis, Nicholas Theolis, Dimitri Theolis and Maria Tatsiopoulos, who are here today for the introduction of a petition on Dimitra Daskalos.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I also want to welcome all the members of the Trans Lobby Group who are here and commend them for the good work that they've been

doing and, in particular, my very good friend Georgina Bencsik, who's part of the group. Thank you for joining us at Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

STUDENT DEMONSTRATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: Mr. Speaker, reports indicate that earlier this month at the University of Western Ontario protestors disrupted a non-political Israel on Campus event, preventing students from entering an Israel Day exhibit. Incidents like these highlight the necessity of standing up against any movement aimed at intimidating and denigrating Jewish students or students of any minority group. Post-secondary institutions are the place for peaceful dialogue and debate, not propaganda and intimidation.

That's why during the previous term I brought forward a resolution to condemn the term "Israel Apartheid Week." I am proud to say that the resolution was passed unanimously with support across all party lines in this House. We all agreed that real solutions begin with debate based on facts, ingrained in truth and carried out with respect for opposing points of view.

I know that many constituents in my riding of Thornhill have children who attend post-secondary institutions across this province, including the university mentioned, and I know that events such as the incident at Western make them concerned for the safety of their children.

In passing the resolution to condemn the term "Israel Apartheid Week," I know that this House showed concerned parents that we expect institutions, organizations and individuals across this province to hold peaceful and truthful debates and never allow cowardice, propaganda and intimidation tactics.

DIMITRA DASKALOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise today on the very sad anniversary of the death of Dimitra Daskalos. She drew her last breath at Toronto General Hospital exactly one year ago. All deaths are sad, but some, like this one, are also tragic.

Her daughter, Maria, and other members of her family are here today because they do not want Dimitra's death to have been in vain. They do not want other families to go through what they have gone through, what their mother went through. Maria's mother was desperately ill and needed hospital care. She was treated as a bed blocker and her family was given a bill for almost \$19,000 for her time in hospital.

The Minister of Health has publicly told us that hospitals aren't able to use threats of such bills against a family. Clearly, given that this is not the only example, the minister's word is not reflected in hospital practice.

Maria raised concerns about infection control and the risk of exposure that her mother was under and was turned over to patient relations. She has asked the minister to investigate, as have I. Failing that, she has asked that the government allow the Ombudsman to be given jurisdiction.

No more daughters should be forced to come here for action after their parents have died. Speaker, the minister must act.

KINDNESS WEEK

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Today at Queen's Park, we launch the third annual Kindness Week. It is an initiative that started in Ottawa in my home community some five years ago. The idea is simple one: that we should engage in random acts of kindness. A simple message but a strong message and an important one that together we, every single day, should do our best to be kind to others and engage in kind acts.

There is a great group of people in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, who are engaged in this initiative. I want to thank MPP Liz Witmer and MPP France Gélinas for their support for this initiative right here at Queen's Park and encourage all members of the Legislature to take the simple but strong message back to their communities and initiate Kindness Week activities.

One other thing, Speaker, thanks to your co-operation, what we engage in this year is to collect sleepwear for abused women and children who are fleeing domestic violence. All of those things will be going to Interval House in Ottawa. Members, staff, everybody can drop gently used or new sleepwear items at the Speaker's office any time for the next week or two.

Lastly, I want to thank the steering committee in Ottawa for the Kindness Week initiative—Rabbi Reuven Bulka, Stephen Lau, Candace Derrickx, Stacey Segal, Lauren Hunter, Dustin Truscio, Kimberly Francoeur, Amy Desjardins, Sonya Kinkade, Julie Lefrancois, Elizabeth Cleland, Jeff Turner, Diana Mitoff, Sharon Diamond, Stacey Diffin-Lafleur, Rosemary Walsh, Trevor Clost, Emily Bolton, Stuart Buist, Scott Oakley and Taline Jirian—for all their hard work in making Kindness Week a successful week in Ottawa and across the province.

ROB SHOULDICE

Mr. Bill Walker: On December 23, my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound lost a great man with the passing of Rob "The Stoneman" Shouldice.

Rob joined the business his father, Bev, and mother, Dorothy, started when he was 16 years old and he would have celebrated 50 years in business in 2012. Rob, along with his wife, June, transformed the traditional cement block company his parents started in 1947. He experimented and patented "designer stone," which is now the base of the company and is sold across the province and across North America.

The third-generation family business—his sons are now carrying on the proud tradition—employs 150 people and has deep roots in the Shallow Lake area reaching back to the 1800s.

People who knew him and worked with him universally say that he was a man of his word, a leader, a great salesman and an innovator, a person who would always ask “Why not?” as opposed to “Why” when faced with a challenge.

Rob Shouldice was a proud promoter of the village in which he was born and grew up, always very dedicated to Shallow Lake and his local community. He was a generous and faithful contributor to many local causes, albeit in a very humble and quiet way. He loved his life and lived every day like it was his last. He was a very successful entrepreneur and businessman; however, he lived by the principle of family first.

Rob is survived by his wife of 41 years, June; his sons Steve, Mark and Brad; his girls Mary, Heather and Lyndsy; and eight cherished grandchildren: Ben, A.J., Jonah, Samantha, Ty, Ellie, Wyatt and Madin; his mom, Dorothy; his brother, Doug and his wife, Cathy; and sisters Joan and her husband, John Lever, and Dale and her husband, Eric Robinson, and extended family.

My community mourns this great individual and my sympathies go out to his family.

Speaker of the House: Thank you, and ours too.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to add to what my colleague Peter Tabuns was saying. At the end of next month, 30 ALC beds will be closed at the Memorial site of the Sudbury hospital. I've already talked to the CEO of our LHIN, the CEO of our CCAC and of our hospital, and they're all saying the same thing: These beds must close due to a lack of funds—and then the scary part—but there's no clear plan that exists to make sure that the frail, elderly people in the beds get to go to a long-term-care home of their choosing.

Closing those beds without providing acceptable options to those people is disrespectful and it is cruel.

Two years ago, we went through the same scenario of closing ALC beds in Sudbury. Mrs. Ransom is still paying for that decision. She has to take two buses every day to go feed and visit her mother who was forced into a home that she did not choose, or threatened with payments.

Carol St. Jacques's father has been waiting for three years for admission into a long-term care home of his choosing. What will happen to him? He is in one of those beds. Will he be forced to pay like what happened to that family?

The scenario is playing out with people who cannot advocate for themselves, people that deserve our protection. Warehousing them into a safe and dry place is not enough. They should be allowed to go to a long-term-care home of their choosing. Until that happens, I cannot agree to the closing of those beds.

1510

LENT

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to mark the beginning of Lent, which begins tomorrow, February 22.

Lent is a 40-day liturgical season that initiates the most sacred part of the Christian year. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on the great vigil of Easter. Sundays are not included in the 40-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of our Lord's resurrection.

On these days, penance is to be considered an important requirement of the Christian life. Fulfillment of this duty involves prayer, works of piety and charity, and self-denial by fulfilling one's obligations more faithfully, including fasting and abstinence.

In the Roman rite, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—and all Fridays—are days of fasting and abstinence from meat, with one full meal and two lighter meals per day.

We of the Christian faith will celebrate Good Friday on April 6 and Easter Sunday on April 8.

It may be appropriate as well, Mr. Speaker, at this time to pass on our great wishes from everyone here in the Legislature today as we acknowledge the archbishop of the diocese of Toronto, Thomas Christopher Collins, who has been elevated to the position of cardinal by Pope Benedict. This includes Toronto, Peel, York and Durham region as far north as Georgian Bay. Congratulations, Cardinal Collins.

JEAN PIGOTT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today I remember a city builder, a great Canadian and, for me, a dear friend. Known as one of the three Morrison sisters—and the eldest, the others being Gay Cook and Grete Hale—Jean Pigott was a businesswoman who turned around her father's company, Morrison Lamothe, well before women were in the boardrooms in this nation.

She ran two royal tours and one for the Pope. She was the director of appointments for Prime Minister Joe Clark and she was named the chair of the National Capital Commission by Prime Minister Mulroney.

As someone who moved to Ottawa later in my life, I appreciated Jean's contribution because she believed, and she instilled in all of us, that Ottawa is every Canadian's second hometown.

But perhaps, Mr. Speaker, what brought Jean and me closest together is a very rare bond in Ottawa politics. We are the only two women to ever have been elected as Ontario and federal Progressive Conservatives in our city. Jean was elected in 1976 in a by-election for Ottawa—Carleton, which is now the riding of Ottawa Centre, which Mr. Naqvi represents. It took 30 years almost to the date before another Progressive Conservative female was elected in the city of Ottawa. That time,

it was me, in a by-election, to represent Nepean–Carleton in this place.

Jean was everything that I had ever asked for in a mentor. She was a great friend and a dear supporter. When it became known that I wasn't the favoured choice of my particular political party in Toronto, Jean Pigott and a number of other women—Walter Baker's daughter Nancy, and Georgie Tupper, the wife of Bill Tupper, the former MP for my riding—stood behind me, among another group of women who really wanted to see another Conservative elected.

I first met Jean in 1999 when I was a young Conservative staffer. She and her sisters, on Sir John A. Macdonald's birthday, came to Parliament Hill and had a birthday party for Sir John A. Many years later, she would endorse me, which was something, Mr. Speaker, I was in awe of for many years.

Her grace, her wisdom and her wonderful character were something that has instilled a great deal of pride, both in myself and among many other people in the city of Ottawa.

She created a great relationship with my husband, whom she would call from time to time when he was working in the Senate, to share great stories and gossip with. And, of course, my daughter Victoria benefited from great stories I could tell about Jean's Ottawa, along with many of the other city builders.

But, Mr. Speaker, today I am in tribute of Jean Pigott and the great things that she did for the city of Ottawa and our nation. I just want to say also that she wasn't just a role model for me or other members of the Progressive Conservative Party; she was a role model for city councillors like Jan Harder and Maria McRae as well as for journalists in the city of Ottawa like Susan Sherring.

So today I just want, on behalf of the women of Ontario, the women of this Legislature and the people of Ottawa, to say thank you to Jean Pigott for her great contributions to our nation and to our city. Rest in peace, Jean.

ELEANOR MILLER

Mr. Bill Mauro: On February 14, Thunder Bay lost one of its finest and most accomplished citizens with the passing of Eleanor Joan Miller, more commonly known as Dusty Miller, at the age of 82.

Dusty Miller was likely best known to the public for two things: first, the fact that she became the first female mayor of the amalgamated city of Thunder Bay, formed by the joining of the former cities of Port Arthur and Fort William; second, for her incredible contribution to the building of a remarkable and vibrant arts and cultural community in our city.

She was an Order of Ontario recipient. She received the Maggie Bassett Award for her outstanding contribution to theatre. She directed the Port Arthur Community Players, later to become the Cambrian Players, and Lakehead Musical Productions, and she was a member of Theatre Northwest, later to become Magnus

Theatre, as well as serving on numerous boards and committees. In fact, there are too many to mention in the time allowed to me today.

Dusty was first elected to city council in 1974, serving till 1978, when she ran for mayor and was successful in defeating Walter Assef. For those who know a little of Thunder Bay's politics, defeating Walter Assef was no small feat. After her term as mayor, Dusty Miller continued to serve her community in elected office as a councillor from 1985 to 1991.

Dusty Miller's legacy includes many contributions, including the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium, one of the finest concert halls in North America, if I might say so. Along with her late husband, Tom Miller, a former professor of mine at Lakehead University, and many others, they helped transform what was formerly Lakehead Technical Institute into Lakehead University.

Those who have held elected office know just how difficult our work can be. I think the words spoken by current councillor Ken Boshcoff, first elected to public office the night Dusty became mayor in 1978, are appropriate and fitting. He said he quickly learned from Dusty Miller that what was best for the city was not always the popular route. Dusty was highly principled and courageous, to the point that it cost her the mayoralty after only one term.

Dusty Miller's commitment to our city was extraordinary. Speaker, my sympathies to her family and friends. Thunder Bay has lost one of its finest.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Introduction of bills?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, sorry. My apologies. The member for Durham.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm surprised at the change of order there.

As the opposition critic for accountability, I would like to remind this government and Premier McGuinty what accountability truly means. It is a very familiar concept, one that this government has found very difficult to understand. Accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for one's actions. The fact is that rather than accept responsibility, this government has chosen to blame those around them.

In scandals such as Ornge, he blames the public sector; eHealth scandal, he blames everyone; failing economy, he blames Europe and Greece; failing health care system, he blames Stephen Harper in Ottawa. The pattern is quite simple, and it can be well understood. When presented with the consequences of his actions, the Premier has skirted the responsibility. He has chosen to ignore responsibility and to ignore his duty to the people of Ontario.

Our great province deserves more accountability in this government. Our people deserve better than Dalton McGuinty. A report card from Don Drummond clearly reveals that after eight years of McGuinty and this government, it's time to own up and accept responsibility for your actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This ends members' statements.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following reports were tabled:

—On December 14, 2011, a special report entitled Investigation into the Ministry of the Attorney General's implementation of recommendations concerning reform of the Special Investigations Unit, from the Ombudsman;

—On January 10, 2012, a special report entitled Biodiversity: A Nation's Commitment, an Obligation for Ontario, a special report to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, from the Environmental Commissioner;

—on February 17, 2012, a report on the election returns with statistics from the records of the 2009-10 by-elections and 2011 general election from the Chief Electoral Officer.

1520

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DU MAJOR-GÉNÉRAL SIR ISAAC BROCK

Mr. Clark moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to proclaim October 13 in each year as Major-General Sir Isaac Brock Day in Ontario / *Projet de loi 32, Loi visant à proclamer le 13 octobre de chaque année Jour du major- général Sir Isaac Brock en Ontario.*

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Clark for a brief statement?

Mr. Steve Clark: Madam Speaker, I'm not going to read the explanatory note. I would like to thank the member for Welland and the member for Niagara Falls for co-sponsoring this bill, as well as the favourable comments that the Minister of the Environment has given me.

This year, as most people know, is the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, and there are several events planned throughout the province. Major-General Sir Isaac Brock was the commander of the military forces in Upper Canada at the time of the war.

The date October 13 was chosen to commemorate the day of his death at the Battle of Queenston Heights,

which was considered by many to be a pivotal battle as part of the War of 1812. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

TOBY'S ACT (RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT BECAUSE OF GENDER IDENTITY OR GENDER EXPRESSION), 2012

LOI TOBY DE 2012 SUR LE DROIT À L'ABSENCE DE DISCRIMINATION ET DE HARCÈLEMENT FONDÉS SUR L'IDENTITÉ OU L'EXPRESSION SEXUELLES

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code with respect to gender identity and gender expression / *Projet de loi 33, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui concerne l'identité et l'expression sexuelles.*

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. DiNovo, you may make a brief statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This bill amends the Human Rights Code to specify—and “specify” is a critical word here—that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of gender identity or gender expression with respect to (a) services, goods and facilities; (b) accommodation; (c) contracting; (d) employment; (e) membership in a trade union, trade or occupational association or self-governing profession. The bill also amends the code to specify that every person has a right to be free from harassment because of gender identity or gender expression with respect to accommodation and employment.

I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre and also the member from Whitby–Oshawa for co-authoring this bill, and the trans lobby for being here to support it. Thank you.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Madam Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Agreed? Agreed. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following change be made to the ballot list for private members' public business:

Mr. Zimmer and Ms. Damerla exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Zimmer assumes ballot item 15 and Ms. Damerla assumes ballot item number 25; and that Mrs. Mangat and Mr. Sergio exchange

places in the order of precedence such that Mrs. Mangat assumes ballot item number 21 and Mr. Sergio assumes ballot item number 32.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents in Oxford, and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Tavistock's Bonnie Brae Health Care Centre is an 80-bed, D-class nursing home that must be either rebuilt or closed by July 2014; and

"Whereas there is currently an application by a private operator to move the 80 licensed beds outside of Oxford county to the city of London, despite the recent opening of two other long-term-care homes in Middlesex county in 2010; and

"Whereas long-term-care wait times in Oxford county can be as much as 134 days longer than in Middlesex county; and

"Whereas Tavistock receives referrals from the nearby Waterloo Wellington CCAC, which has among the highest waits for long-term care in the province;

"We, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario retain these beds in Tavistock and seek partners to fast-track replacement of the Bonnie Brae as part of Ontario's 10-year plan to modernize 35,000 long-term care beds."

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to read this petition into the record, and I affix my signature as I wholeheartedly agree with this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas much of the suffering of the late Dimitra Daskalos while in the hands of the health care system of Ontario could have been avoided;

"Whereas the Minister of Health has publicly stated that elderly patients in hospital in need of long-term care are not to be subjected to threats of heavy fees by hospitals in order to get them to leave those hospitals;

"Whereas Dimitra Daskalos and her family were subjected to such pressure, as have other families;

"Whereas patients and their families have not found satisfaction of their grievances in investigations by hospital-based patient advocates or ombudsmen;

"Whereas it is clear that there is a shortage of home care and quality long-term care for the elderly;

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

"To do all within its power to ensure that there is adequate home and long-term care for the elderly;

"To grant powers of investigation of health system problems to the Ombudsman of Ontario;

"To direct the Minister of Health to make sure her directions regarding extra billing used to force patients out of hospital beds while they await long-term care are actually followed."

Speaker, I support this petition. I add my signature, the 5,374th, to this petition and pass it on to you.

Applause.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: What an incredible response to a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

"Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada;

"Whereas real progress has been made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bioartificial kidney;

"We, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bioartificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States."

Madam Speaker, I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

1530

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's wonderful to see you back in 2012.

I have a very important petition, signed by the students and the parents of Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School, and it is petitioning the Legislative Assembly.

"During the academic year 2012-13, LDHSS"—Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School—"will have a need of 24 portables to accommodate all the students. In year 2013-14 there would be a minimum of 28 portables, year 2014-15 there would be a minimum of 30 portables, and year 2015-16 there would be a minimum of 35 portables on site.

"It is imperative for the Ministry of Education to recognize and acknowledge the seriousness of this overcrowding issue and lack of space at the LDHSS immediately.

"We are urging the ministry to provide the capital funding to build the additional wing. This will allow children of the community to attend their community public school and receive a high quality of education in a

facility that has adequate specialized classroom space and other facilities.”

Madam Speaker, as you're aware, Nepean–Carleton has one of the fastest-growing communities in all of Canada in Barrhaven, which had 25% growth in the last five years. Therefore, as the member of provincial Parliament for Nepean–Carleton, I support the students and the parents of Longfields-Davidson Heights school, and I affix my signature and am very proud that the students took the time to fill 750 names on this petition.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury and Nickel Belt.

“Whereas the Ontario government made PET scanning ... a publicly insured health service; and

“Whereas,” since October 2009, “insured PET scans” are performed “in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North, the regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through Health Sciences North, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask page Jason to bring it to the clerks.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: Today I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of Bonnie Easer, who lives in Bewdley, Ontario, which is actually in the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West, but did drop this petition by my office. It says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada;

“Whereas real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bioartificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bioartificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

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

CURRICULUM

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Denise Bowes and Joy Goodfellow, who

brought this petition to me. They just started collecting signatures in December, and they've done a tremendous job in mobilizing public support. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has deemed music an essential subject in elementary schools and the ministry arts curriculum states that high-quality instruction is key to student success in arts education; and

“Whereas, according to a 2010 Coalition for Music Education study, 58% of all elementary schools in Ontario are without a qualified music teacher capable of teaching the ministry curriculum; and

“Whereas, due to classroom capping and staff cuts, school boards are unable to provide this essential subject with teachers who have the expertise to ensure student success; and

“Whereas protecting music in elementary schools would ensure children benefit from the many positive aspects of this essential subject;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Minister of Education to declare music in Ontario elementary schools a protected subject, thus ensuring teachers delivering the program are familiar with the elements of music, can read and interpret music and are able to communicate in a musical way.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature to the petition and send it to the table with page Katelyn.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: This is on behalf of the hundreds of residents in Prince Edward county, in my riding of Prince Edward–Hastings.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the proposed Gilead Power project in Prince Edward county is currently planned for an area that the municipality has designated for another purpose; and

“Whereas it's the opinion of real estate experts in Prince Edward county that the installation of the Gilead industrial wind factory will negatively impact property values and the tourism sector, which is vital to the economic success of Prince Edward county; and

“Whereas other jurisdictions have recognized that it is environmentally counterproductive to put industrial wind factories in important bird areas, such as the one that exists on the south shore of Prince Edward county; and

“Whereas that recognition was also accepted by the Senate of Canada through a unanimous resolution;

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

“That the public consultation period for the EBR project number 011-5239, also known as the Gilead project, be extended to April 1 to allow the community sufficient time to make clear their arguments as to the negative impact that the project will have on the people, economy and ecology of Prince Edward county.”

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas global climate change is the most serious threat facing humanity and poses significant risks to our environment, economy, society and human health; and

“More than 97% of scientists working in the disciplines contributing to studies of our climate and all national science academies accept that climate change is almost certainly being caused by human activities mainly due to the use of fossil fuels; and

“The objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is ‘stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’; and

“Climate scientists are now warning us that limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees centigrade is essential; and

“Ontario has a clear responsibility to reduce our emissions given that our per capita greenhouse gas emissions”—as are most in North America—“are among the highest in the world; and

“With the introduction of the Green Energy Act and feed-in tariff program, Ontario is an example to the rest of the world of the principle of renewable energy development; and

“The best research today indicates that energy demands are decreasing and that sufficient potential energy from a diverse supply of renewable sources exists to meet Ontario’s current and projected energy demands;

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

“Immediately prepare a plan that requires that 100% of Ontario’s stationary energy be from zero-carbon sources before the end of 2023, with a timeline to be audited annually by the Auditor General and published reports.”

I submit this on behalf of Zero Carbon Ontario, and I put my signature on it as well.

WIND TURBINES

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

“Whereas there is a growing body of evidence confirming industrial wind development has serious adverse effects on host communities;

“Whereas over 135 people in Ontario have reported serious negative health effects from industrial wind development, and at least a dozen families have been bought out of their homes;

“Whereas Ontario’s Green Energy Act has ended local planning control by stripping municipal councils of their rights;

“Whereas 80 municipal councils, representing two million Ontarians, called on the government to put in place a full moratorium on industrial wind development

until an independent epidemiological health study is completed, proper environmental regulations and protections are put in place, and local democracy is restored;

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

“Immediately put a moratorium on all industrial wind proposals; fund an independent epidemiological health study to develop safe setbacks; legislate those findings; develop stringent environmental protection standards for natural areas; and require all projects to comply with regulations based on science and local planning.”

I’m happy to sign that petition.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’m pleased to present a petition today on behalf of my neighbour, Lois Kelly, who lives beside me on 327 Maniece Avenue in Peterborough, Ontario.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada;

“Whereas real progress has been made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bioartificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bioartificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

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

WIND TURBINES

Mr. John O’Toole: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the proposed Gilead power project in Prince Edward county is currently planned for an area that the municipality has designated for another purpose; and

“Whereas it’s the opinion of the real estate experts in Prince Edward county that the installation of the Gilead industrial wind factory will negatively impact property values and the tourism sector, which is vital to the economic success of Prince Edward county; and

“Whereas other jurisdictions have recognized that it is environmentally counterproductive to put industrial wind factories in important bird areas, such as the one that exists on the south shore of Prince Edward county; and

“Whereas that recognition was also accepted by the Senate of Canada through a unanimous resolution;

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

“That the public consultation period for the EBR project number 011-5239, also known as the Gilead project, be extended to April 1 to allow the community sufficient time to make clear their arguments as to the

negative impact that the project will have on the people, economy and ecology of Prince Edward county.”

I'm pleased to sign in support of the people from Wind Concerns Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 8, 2011, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to rise here today to talk about this government bill, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, 2012.

I have to say to you, Speaker, that the title of the bill is much grander than the bill itself. The bill is fairly straightforward. It allows for households, residences of seniors, to be able to claim tax credits for modifications for ramps or bathroom rebuilding so that those homes are accessible to those seniors.

But I want to say that first of all, if you're a senior—let's say you're trying to get along on Canada pension and OAS and Gains—you have to have a fair amount of money in the first place to be able to invest in that house in order to claim this credit. It's 15% of what you invest, so if you have \$10,000 you can get up to \$1,500 back. I don't know about you, Speaker—I meet a lot of seniors as I go door-to-door in my riding, and many of them would be very hard-pressed to pull together \$10,000 for home renovations.

So this bill, this tax credit may be helpful to those seniors who do have ready cash at hand but will be of very, very limited use to the large numbers of seniors who are just trying to hold it together—seniors who, in my experience, talk to me about the difficulties they face with pensions that do not keep up with their cost of living; seniors who talk to me about property taxes that go up faster than their incomes and do not reflect their ability to pay, and those seniors who are continuing to carry the burden of the provincial download of expenses that was made in the Harris era and has been continued by this Liberal government. Those seniors are very worried about their ability to stay in their homes.

Speaker, I have great confidence that everyone in this House knows that seniors need support. They need support to be able to stay in their homes and maintain their independence as long as they possibly can. But to assume that the majority of seniors in this province have the money to make full use of this tax credit is not an accurate assumption by any means.

If we're going to talk about how we help seniors stay in their homes, then we have to talk about making direct grants to seniors so that they can put in a ramp, so that they can modify their bathrooms for accessibility. We have to talk about providing home care on an adequate basis so that those seniors who are largely healthy but becoming more frail can get help here and there to allow them to live in dignity, to live with some control of their home environment. Those things would make for much healthier homes, and it's those questions that we would like this government to address. It's those questions of affordability, it's those questions of health care that need to be addressed, along with a system that allows those seniors who don't have \$10,000 in cash to actually make the investments they need so that their homes are accessible and safe, so that they're protected from fall injuries.

Speaker, this government has made a very big deal about legislation stimulating \$800 million in home renovation activity and the creation of 10,500 jobs throughout the Ontario economy annually. However, there's no requirement in this bill that these supplies, these renovations, these modifications be sourced here in Ontario. So we may well be importing good-quality bathroom fittings from Italy, from the United States, from China—not bad places, but if we're going to create jobs here in Ontario, we need to be using this kind of spending bill to ensure that it's Ontario manufactured goods that are installed. That will have a substantial impact on manufacturing as well as construction here in Ontario.

If we are going to proceed with this kind of bill, I'd ask the government, when we go to committee, to bring forward the reports that we need to see on how many seniors would actually need something other than a tax credit, would actually need a direct grant. We need to know, now whether or not this program will be offered and the money will just simply sit in the treasury.

Speaker, as you may well be aware, this government, in its 2007 election platform, promised a dental care program for low-income children, low-income teenagers in this province, and the reality was that the restrictions in regulation were so tight that almost no one qualified for the care that had been promised. So person after person who desperately needed dental care was turned away, while at the same time the money that had been promised sat in the treasury. For the Liberal government, it was the perfect program: The money was promised and they got credit, but they didn't actually have to spend the cash.

It's a lot like the student fee rebate that was offered. During the last election, if you didn't read the fine print,

you didn't know that half or more of the students in this province in post-secondary education wouldn't qualify. I have to tell you, the students in my riding and, my guess, the students in Essex and Hamilton Mountain and in Timiskaming—they've found out, because they send us emails. They say, "Just a second. We were promised a 30% reduction. But we don't qualify? What? I'm an older student going back to school so that I have greater opportunity for employment in a very tough economy. Why don't I qualify?"

So the question I have in this bill as well is, is there going to be a real commitment by this government to ensure that the bill results in aid being given to those who the bill says need that aid? From recent history, I would assume, that there's a very good chance much of this money will simply stay in the treasury and not actually reach seniors, not actually result in homes being modified as they should be modified to ensure that people can stay in them safely and for extended periods.

Now, I think it would be useful for the government to bring forward their research on the low-income seniors who can't afford to actually do this work. But I'll give their researchers a bit of help. There are almost 100,000 low-income seniors in this province—100,000.

1550

The poverty rate amongst women age 65-plus is 7.25%, and for the men about 4.75%. That's a lot of people who will never receive any benefit from this bill—never receive any benefit. Do they not deserve to have the modifications to their homes so they don't break their hip falling on stairs? Do they not deserve the modifications so they can properly and without risk wash themselves? I don't see anything in this bill, and I fear that when the regulations are written, what is already fairly tight in terms of the number of people this bill helps—that those regulations will be tightened and tightened and tightened so that household after household is set aside, is forgotten, and all that is remembered is that this Liberal government passed a bill with a very nice name.

Speaker, no one can stand against or speak out against assistance for seniors. It makes sense to us. All that we in the NDP ask is that when assistance is given, it is real, it is effective, and it is available to all the seniors who need the help.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to speak for two minutes on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I was just thinking I could talk about the home renovations that my parents had to do with 10 children. Obviously, there were continual extensions on the house. But I think this is just a parallel situation to a corporation who may do any type of construction work or expansion in a business. The spinoffs when you do something like this are ongoing. The spinoffs to the local economy: Someone is going to do the work; someone is going to buy the goods; someone is going to deliver the goods to you; someone is probably going to hire an assistant. He

may have to subcontract certain work. That's more employment that is going to come from our very same community.

I can tell you, when I started my business, which would be—I might give away a hint; I might let you know that I could be a year older than John O'Toole. As a teenager, I started my business 51 years ago, and I can tell you that it's run by my family now so I'm not involved. But when staff hires someone for construction, there's a buzz about. People in the industry actually have employment. They hire other people and it creates additional jobs, albeit for not great lengths of time, but for short time frames. This is what this Legislature is about this term: It's jobs, jobs and jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened closely to the member of the NDP party, and it is their duty to stand up for those people that are finding the economy difficult today, especially seniors. I think Premier McGuinty, in his deliberation here on this Bill 11, has once again decided to solve every problem by spending money.

I think he raised a very good point about who qualifies, and that's the real subtlety of this bill. There's a limitation on income and there's a limitation on the purpose, what it can be spent on. So it sounds good, but again, once you peel back the banana skin, you find out that there's a rotten banana inside.

Now, there's a fundamental thing, that all Ontarians should be treated fairly. What we think is, does it reduce the size and cost of government? We're sort of following the template by Don Drummond. Now, Premier McGuinty doesn't seem to get it. Just now, he isn't contrite enough about his inability to balance the books, or even look forward to do it. Does it reduce the size and cost of government? Does it contribute to the public sector—or the private sector, rather—job creation? Does it ensure accountability and value for money for the taxpayer?

On all three of those quite straightforward accountability mechanisms, it fails.

Now, the whole theme here is, he's picking again one group of citizens versus another. But if you look at Don Drummond's report, there's so much in there that's so mean-spirited—really, if you look at it. It seems to me that he's picking on seniors. The Ontario seniors' drug benefit is one example. They're going to give it with one side and take it away with the other side. They're going to charge children to go on school buses to go to school in the country.

At the end of the day, he has to take responsibility for the mess that Ontario is in. It's a shame that he won't stand up here and say what he's going to do to rectify things.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to speak today on the healthy homes renovation tax credit. One thing the government should

get a prize for is beautiful titles and not much behind them. I've learned that in my short time here. Somebody's really good at naming titles.

There are a lot of the things—we should be helping seniors stay in their homes, but this bill should be more focused. I heard the honourable member across the way say it's all about jobs, jobs, jobs, but I thought it's all about keeping seniors in their homes. If you're really going to keep seniors in their homes—and when I had my seniors call me, they asked about the particulars, and do you know what? If we raise the percentage that they get, you would have more people doing it and you'd be keeping more seniors in their homes. If that's the true purpose of this bill, the healthy homes renovation tax credit—again, a lovely name—we would raise the percentage and keep more seniors in their homes; or we would make a grant and keep even more seniors in their homes; or we would increase what qualified, because some of the seniors who call my office have a hard time paying their heating bill or have a hard time paying something otherwise and would love to have a walk-in shower, but they're more worried about keeping a roof over their head.

It would be great if this bill could be more focused and if the government could actually say, "We are focused on keeping seniors in their homes. We're not focused on nice titles and trying to create some jobs and maybe giving the more well-to-do seniors a tax break."

I would really hope that the government is really focused on keeping seniors in their homes and that we can work on this bill in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Bill Mauro: What happened here?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I wasn't sure.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Speaker. I apologize to our member from Niagara. I thought I got grabbed by the whip here to do two minutes.

I'm happy to speak briefly on the healthy homes renovation tax credit. It's relevant because I can tell you that in my constituency office in Thunder Bay–Atikokan we are receiving calls from seniors who are very much interested in this, and it's an opportunity for me to remind people who might have been somewhat unsure or misled by some of the discussion in the Legislature that you don't have to spend \$10,000 to be able to tap into the program. Some people seem to be somehow under that impression. Of course, that's the maximum allowable per year, which would get you a full tax credit of \$1,500; \$10,000 is the maximum allowable. You don't have to spend \$10,000. You can spend a lesser amount. If you invested \$5,000 into eligible components of the program, then you'd be eligible for half the maximum credit, \$750. And if you were to invest \$1,000, then you'd get about \$150 on a tax credit.

It's a good program. It's one that we're proud of. I know, as I've said already, it's one that seniors in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan are interested in taking up.

The example of the \$1,000 I'll use that will get you \$150 back is—there was a private member's bill introduced when we first came back after the election in the fall that was going to provide seniors and others with home heating relief. In the words of the person who brought the bill forward, that was going to only save people in the province of Ontario a maximum of \$100—about 27 cents a day. That was brought forward with great fanfare.

Here, we have a program that can help seniors stay in their own home, where they want to stay. It has the ability to actually leverage them more financial room—as I've said, up to \$1,500 year over year—as well as create jobs at the same time.

As I've said, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan this looks to be picking up some steam. Seniors are interested in this, and we know they want to stay in their own homes. It's a good program, and it's one that I support.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Toronto–Danforth has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, thank you, Speaker. My thanks as well to the members from Ajax–Pickering, Durham, Timiskaming–Cochrane and Thunder Bay–Atikokan for their comments.

A few responses: one to the member for Ajax–Pickering, who may well have been in his very early teens when he started that business. If the government is interested in job creation, why is it that it ended the energy home retrofit program? That program was creating jobs, helping the environment. It was a positive contribution. I don't have anything against creating jobs through supporting construction; I think it's a good idea. I don't have anything against providing tax credits to seniors to make their homes accessible. What I have to ask is why it is that home energy savings programs have been cut and those jobs, and the loss of those jobs, has not been recognized by this government.

The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan is quite correct: You don't have to spend \$10,000 to get a \$1,500 tax credit; it's just that what people hear most of the time is they'll get a credit of \$1,500. What they haven't heard is that you have to spend \$10,000 to get that much of a return. The reality is, of course, that the return and the tax credit depend on how much you put in. If you don't have \$5,000 or \$10,000, you aren't going to get a lot of money back.

Speaker, if we are concerned about keeping seniors in their homes there needs to be more than this tax credit. This tax credit, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. It's probably a good thing, but inadequate. What we need is a strategy for making sure that seniors have the support across the spectrum of health care affordability and accessibility.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It gives me great pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act. This is one of a number of initiatives that our government has taken in order to try and keep our seniors in their own homes for as long as is feasible.

Why is this so important? It's not only, of course, for the quality of life of those individuals, to stay in the home that they may have lived in for decades and where they are comfortable, but also we've shown that in fact it's much better for their health. Their health outcomes are better if in fact they are able to stay in such a situation. And, of course, there is the issue of cost as well, not only for individuals and their families as compared, for example, with going into a long-term-care facility or even a retirement home, but of course, the cost to the taxpayer is also important. In fact, the recent Drummond report made it very clear that whatever we can do in terms of community health care as opposed to institutional health care is going to be a cost savings.

Now, in my own riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, during the recent election, I had—obviously—the opportunity to knock on many, many doors. What I find so fascinating about that experience is that you never quite know who is going to come to the door and what the family makeup in that home actually is. In many parts of my riding, there are families with three generations living under one roof. This is often where newer Canadians have come, established themselves, are working long hours. They have children. The grandparents are in the home to assist with child care, meal preparation and so on, and it's absolutely vital to that family unit to in fact have those three generations living together. It's important in terms of preserving the culture from where they came, but it's also a very important and practical assistance to them to stay as that type of extended family unit in their own homes. So this bill will also help family members where they're sharing their home with a senior.

Some of the comments made by our friend from Toronto–Danforth relate to the need to stimulate those jobs in the economy through various tax credits. Again, the federal 2009 home renovation tax credit did show that there was a tremendous take-up from that tax credit. Again, during the election, wandering around my neighbourhood, I was able to talk to a number of small contractors, small businessmen who, in fact, had been contracted under that home renovation tax credit to provide some retrofits within homes in my riding. So there certainly are, as my colleague from Ajax–Pickering has said, some real spinoff benefits to the local economy from this type of tax credit.

Now, just to make sure everyone understands the details of the bill: If passed, this bill will be retroactive to October 2011. Certainly, I've taken every opportunity to remind seniors in my community, if they have made some renovations, to keep those tax receipts in anticipation of this bill passing in this House, which will clearly require some co-operation from the members of

the two opposition parties. I would certainly hope that we're going to see that type of co-operation that will assist our seniors.

The point has been very clearly made that this is a 15% tax credit of whatever the expenditure is. Some of the renovations may be relatively low-cost: things like grab bars; reinforcements around the toilet, bathtub and shower; handrails in corridors. These are pretty low-cost items, but 15% of whatever that cost is can certainly assist the seniors in question.

Some of the renovations, though, would potentially be considerably more expensive. When we're talking about things like stairlifts and ramps, those type of expenditures may very well be in the order of \$5,000 or \$6,000. But again, 15% of that is a substantial amount.

There are a number of really quite innovative eligible expenses, and I think the more people read and understand what is available to them in the home, the more the uptake will be: things like changing the knobs on door handles to levers, making it easier for seniors; the same thing with taps, for those arthritic hands, which may make life that much more comfortable and easier. All these types of renovations, in fact, are going to be eligible.

This particular bill is one of only many that this government has introduced. I'm really pleased to remind this House of some of these supports that we have provided for seniors since 2003. We have enhancements to energy and property tax credits for seniors. We've provided additional tax relief to some 740,000 seniors to help them with their energy costs and property taxes. Seniors can get a maximum credit of \$1,025 annually.

I don't think we should forget the types of cuts that we've made to personal income tax. On average, 93% of income tax payers are getting a personal income tax cut and are now saving some \$200 annually. Again, to the member for Toronto–Danforth, I'd like to remind him that some 90,000 Ontarians no longer pay any provincial income tax.

Other tax credits, such as the Ontario sales tax credit, have been of assistance. Seniors in the north who pay rent or property tax for their principal residence are eligible for an annual credit of up to \$130 for a single person and up to \$200 for a family.

In addition, we have the Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant. Eligible seniors are going to continue to receive additional assistance with their property taxes through this grant, which started in 2009. The maximum grant was doubled to \$500 in 2010. This was announced back in 2008.

So what you're seeing, in fact, is a steady concentration on this very important issue.

I'd like to touch a little bit on what we've been doing in terms of aging at home and improving home care services. During the last couple of months, certainly in my constituency office, I've received a steady stream of stakeholders and constituents who have come to tell me about the situation, either for themselves or with their agency, so I was very interested to meet with Central

CCAC, the community care access centre, under the leadership of their CEO, Cathy Szabo. The Central CCAC actually has a very large population base that needs to be served—some 1.7 million—and in the year 2010-11 they served some 81,164 clients, and of those, some 58% were seniors.

1610

I was very interested in what they had to tell me about their Home First program, which was specifically designed to keep seniors in their own home following discharge from hospital. So instead of moving into a long-term-care facility, in the Home First program there is intensive case management for a period of some 90 days. The point of this particular intensive case management is to look at what an individual, a senior, might require in their own home in order to stay there.

So in addition to nursing visits, as you might expect, an occupational therapist or a physiotherapist will visit within three days of discharge from hospital. This is the type of trained health professional who can look at activities of daily living for their client and make the type of suggestions that would be eligible for this particular tax credit. Often, homeowners are really quite unaware of what they could do.

They've had tremendous success with this particular program and, in fact, looking back at the last year, they were able to ensure that some 70% of their clients were able to stay at home with regular home care services with the types of additions and assistance, including physical assistance, such as these home renovations that we're talking about today.

To me, it's quite clear that we need to pass Bill 2. I'm optimistic that we'll have support from all sides of the House in relation to this bill. I'm sure that your constituents, just like mine, will see it clearly as a benefit. Is there more to do? No question. But this particular piece of legislation is an important part of the puzzle.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm choosing to address the proposed healthy homes renovation tax credit that should probably be renamed the wealthy home renovation tax credit: a 15% tax credit up to \$10,000. But my question is, how many seniors have that extra \$10,000 for home renovations just to get \$1,500 back?

Let's do the math. These same seniors will have to pay an additional 13% HST for a total of \$1,300. The net is now only \$200 and, with my math, that's not a very good ROI, return on investment. That's about a 2% return. I'm concerned that this is going to cost Ontario taxpayers considerable money.

What we have learned from the Liberal government is that they do not give one all of the necessary details to make informed decisions. I've yet to see what type of renovations actually qualify for this proposed bill.

My concerns are twofold. First of all, this bill could very definitely foster the underground economy. Secondly, as I look back, this is reminiscent of this government's election promise of reducing tuitions by

30%. Once elected, the students and parents actually found out the real rules, which have left many students without tuition relief.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I do not support this wealthy home renovation tax credit.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions? The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to welcome you and everyone else back from our break, and comment for a few moments on the comments made by the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

She spoke very thoroughly on the healthy homes renovation tax credit, and she touched on several good points. But I just want to focus on one thing that she said, and that is that when you go out into the riding and you talk to your business people and your residents, you realize what is really going on. There are a lot of seniors out there who need help, and when you actually go to their homes, you see they're installing items like wheelchair ramps and even a lot of things inside the house.

I went to one home and the person actually had installed a chair that goes from the ground floor and moves automatically to the second floor. They don't have to worry about walking up and down the stairs, especially if they have bad knees or bad hips.

This bill touches on one key point that I think is really important, and that is that it keeps seniors in their homes. I can't express how important that is. No one, no senior, really wants to move into a nursing home or other locations or institutions. They like to stay in their homes. This bill, among other things, allows seniors to stay in their homes, which is what they want to do. When you go into these homes, you see how well decorated or how well kept the home is, because that's their main asset. I think they want to stay in their homes.

I know my time is running low, and I will be speaking later on this afternoon—stay tuned—on this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to take a moment during this debate of Bill 2 to talk about a meeting I had in my constituency office during the House recess with one of my constituents, Ron Stewart.

Speaker, you won't find a more hard-working, play-by-the-rules kind of guy than Ron, who operates a small business, Stewart Property Maintenance. He came to see me to talk about the HST, which has devastated his home service business over the last year and a half. It's a story I've heard far too many times since the McGuinty government brought in this hated tax in the midst of a severe economic downturn.

Ron's experience—his ongoing struggles to survive—really is a story of what's happening in Ontario today under Dalton McGuinty's watch. Ron talked about how the HST has made it more difficult for homeowners to afford his services, making it harder for him to earn a

living and to hire people to work in the riding. He falls above the \$30,000 threshold. Thanks to this government, he now has to charge an additional 13% on grass cutting, snow removal and housekeeping, vital services that are often overlooked when we talk about helping seniors stay in their home longer.

Ron spoke about Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit, and he shared a comment that I've heard so many times: "Where are these seniors—where does this government think seniors are going to have \$10,000 to spend? Are they really that out of touch?" And he suggested to me, and I think it's a good suggestion, that if we're going to be serious about keeping seniors in their home, we need to have those services like his business provides available.

It's unfortunate that the government didn't listen to folks like Ron Stewart when they put forward Bill 2. I can tell you, when we're debating the legislation today, I know that their piece of legislation isn't going to have the impact on seniors in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to be back and indeed an honour to speak to Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

Much has been made about the quite lengthy title. It is essentially offering some small measure of relief to seniors who find themselves in their homes, who wish to stay in their homes as they age and require some help with those services—grab bars and accessibility services. But what we're saying here on the left side of the House, on the New Democratic side of the House, is that it really doesn't go far enough.

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Ultimately, we know we have a crisis in this province and, arguably, across the country, when it comes to dealing with our aging demographic, particularly in my riding, in Windsor and Essex county. The member across the way from Windsor West would know the challenges that we face in long-term-care facilities, and some of the shortfalls that this government has made when it comes to funding and actually coming to the table with a plan that will address those needs. Thankfully, we're seeing some signs of hope in that area, but I know there are other regions in Ontario that continue to suffer.

We question the premise. We question the impact that this bill will have. We also look to other models in other jurisdictions, because there has to be someone who has done it better than this government is proposing to. We see a government in Quebec, as a matter of fact, that offers us a clear indication of how they've dealt with this issue. They've offered grants of up to \$3,500 that would definitely ease the burden for people looking to retrofit their homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the members for Chatham–Kent–Essex, Scarborough Southwest, Leeds–Grenville and Essex.

Certainly I heard from the NDP that this initiative perhaps isn't as large as they would like to see; they're talking about grants and so on. I would urge them to, in fact, review the Drummond report in perhaps a more comprehensive way. It's incredibly clear from that report that we are facing very, very sobering economic times. It's incumbent on our government to target programs specifically where we can to assist people, to move towards community health care, but we can't continue to just write blank cheques.

This is a balanced and very prudent approach. It's showing, I think, considerable leadership in our emphasis on keeping seniors at home.

In terms of the opposition, I think they're trying to tell us that this is a negligible amount, to a certain extent; I'm not quite sure what their solution would be.

I certainly know, from what I have heard from my seniors—and like, I'm sure, all of you, I've spent a lot of time out there in the community. I have heard nothing but positive remarks on this small piece of assistance to seniors for them to stay in their own homes. Along with the continued emphasis on Aging at Home strategies, where home care is to protect the frail elderly, preventing institutionalization, I think that we are going to see tremendous improvement in the health of our seniors over time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member mentioned that the Drummond report was something that we should take into consideration. I would mention to the member that the Drummond report is really a report card on the last eight years of spending beyond our abilities throughout Ontario in almost every area. As a report card on Ontario's fiscal responsibility, I'm afraid the Premier—the educational Premier for Ontario—has got an F in every situation. He has never seen an expenditure that he hasn't supported. He has never said no to anyone. And now we find ourselves in a situation in Ontario that is on a road to destruction of one of the greatest provinces in Canada in one of the greatest countries in the world. That's a huge indictment on how the McGuinty government has failed the people of Ontario.

Here we are, the first day back. As the member mentioned, we have this humongous problem facing us that Drummond has pointed out to us, and what are we debating? Are we debating the future of our province? Are we debating the real issues that Ontarians are concerned about, about the jobs they might not have in the future, about the careers that their children may not have in the future? Is that what we're debating today? No. No, I'm sad to say that we're debating a bill that will have a minimal effect on very few people in Ontario, Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act.

There's a number of criteria associated with it, of course. One of the criteria is you have to be over 65 years of age before you can apply for it. I won't suggest that there might have been political implications in that, but they're 65 years old.

You must live in the home. It must be your permanent home. It can't be your second home; it can't be a cottage, for instance.

There is no income test, of course, for this, which is positive. It's available to owners and renters.

But the criteria that I like the best, the criteria that brings a smile to my face every time I read it, is that no improvement may increase the value of the property. So if you're going to renovate your bathroom, and you're going take out the tub, and you're going to put in a shower, which is easier for a senior to get in and out of, that might be a good thing. But be sure you hire a very mediocre plumber so that when you put in that shower, it looks terrible, and it won't increase the value of your home; otherwise, it doesn't qualify.

If you put a new shower in your bathroom, it's going to increase the value of your home. Then you would be disqualified from this program. So make sure when you put it in, it looks shoddy.

The member mentioned that you might change your taps from screw taps to lever taps, which is a very good point. But when you buy the new handles to put on your taps, make sure they don't match; that way it won't improve the value of your home.

Mr. John O'Toole: Now you've got to hire inspectors to figure this all out.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: And, of course, as the member from Durham mentions, there will be the bureaucratic inspectors coming around to check to see if the value of this house has been improved. If you do a really nice job—

Mr. John O'Toole: You could end up owing them money.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —they'll pass it on to the municipal inspectors, and the value of your house will go up, and you'll pay more taxes on it.

Why would they put that into a bill? It's obviously there for political motivation. This government is far too concerned about political motivation and not concerned enough with Ontario's future, Ontario's jobs, the things that are going to create prosperity in the future. This government seems to routinely ignore those things.

The tax credit has been mentioned; it's 15% of up to a \$10,000 expenditure, so it's \$1,500 back. Of course, in order to obtain that or some portion of it, you're going to have to spend 13% in HST taxes, so the net cost of this to government, of course, is much reduced.

One thing that confused me: The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan in his two-minute comment mentioned that this credit would be good year over year. I don't know whether a senior can apply for it this year, they can apply for it again next year, and they can apply for it, I guess, for a third year. That isn't mentioned in the bill, but the member quite likely might know something about how the government is going to implement this; we don't see what the regulations might bring.

They estimate this bill will be costing about \$60 million in this fiscal year this year and next year. From the date of introduction to March 31, 2013, it will cost

\$60 million. You know, since being re-elected, this government has increased spending by \$2.5 billion through bills like this—\$2.5 billion. Drummond says that we're in terrible financial straits, and yet this government continues to spend. It continues this out-of-control spending that it's had for the past eight or nine years.

Mr. John O'Toole: They're addicted. They have an addiction problem.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's an addiction that I don't believe that this government can change, and that makes for a very sad day for Ontario and our future.

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Our debt, which is currently just about \$240 billion—Drummond says it will be in excess of \$400 billion if nothing is done. That debt puts us on the road to, if not at, the situation that Greece finds itself in today.

There's nothing that guarantees that a province or a city is going to continue to grow. There's nothing mandated that says Ontario will continue to prosper down the road. It's good fiscal management by its provincial government and by its municipal governments that creates that opportunity for growth.

When I was growing up in the early 1960s, Buffalo, New York, and Toronto were both about a million in population. Through good management, provincially and municipally, Toronto continued to grow. Today it's 2.5 million people. Buffalo, which was a million people at the same time, is today about half a million people. Half the population of Buffalo have moved out because they didn't have the kind of responsible government that we've had in Ontario.

And this government isn't continuing that responsible government. This government is continuing spendthrift ways that are leading us down a path of destruction. They continue to borrow money from future taxpayers, and they're borrowing that money from future taxpayers without the future taxpayers' permission. In any other place in our society, when you take money from someone without their permission, it's called robbery, it's called stealing, and you go to jail for it. This government is doing exactly that. It's borrowing money from future taxpayers without those taxpayers' permission. It's a disgusting thing to do, and this government should give serious thought as to how it is conducting the business of this province.

This bill will not help seniors. As was pointed out by the member from Danforth, it will help a very select few; it won't help many. And our seniors deserve so much better. They built this province into the pinnacle of the shining city on the hill. People from around the world flocked here. They are no longer flocking. They are coming slowly but at a much slower rate than they did in the past. They're going to other parts of Canada where there is much more opportunity for them than there is in the province of Ontario. It is such a sad day to watch this province float down that road, which has a very sad ending to it.

I think there's a way in which we can turn Ontario around. I think there's a way in which we can control our

spending. I think there's a way in which we can build business in this province. Building business is the important part of it, because every time you create a new job, you create a new taxpayer, and that makes the paying down of debt easier. This government has to move down that road with all possible haste and, sadly, I don't think you have the intestinal fortitude to—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: Madam Speaker, I'm happy to speak to this bill also, because in Hamilton Mountain I spoke with many seniors during the campaign, and it wasn't about how they're going to spend the extra money in their pockets. It really, truly was about how they're going to stay in their homes.

But during our campaign platform, we were putting forth initiatives such as helping seniors with snow shovelling, cutting the grass, getting groceries into their homes, making sure that they had people there who were going to be able to help them clean their house, with extra initiatives on top of that. That's great, because I know that they can use hand pulls helping them and assisting them with those kinds of devices, but it's just truly not enough.

We need to make sure that we are there assisting them daily, daily, daily. They don't want to be in long-term-care facilities, Madam Speaker; they want to be in their homes, but that's going to take more than a 15% tax break by a lot of seniors who I know in my constituency just can't afford it. They're more worried about their pensions and about how they're going to be able to pay for their prescriptions than they are a handrail for their bathroom. These are the kinds of things that we need to make sure that we're looking at.

I agree: The Drummond report says that we need to make cuts. Well, we need to make sure that we're spending money in the right directions, to make sure that it counts at the end of the day, not just throwing frivolous things on the table to make it look good, with a great name tied to it.

Thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I was pleased to see this bill come into the Legislature.

I participated in the federal program that was on in 2009-10 and made improvements to my home from an energy point of view—and also a new roof. That was a program that you didn't have to spend the big dollars on. You could do whatever you needed with the house. That was a successful program. It created employment, and people were able to make a lot of renovations to their homes.

This would be retroactive, I think, to October 2011, if the bill passes.

I keep in good touch with seniors in the seniors' groups in Orléans. We've got about 3,000 seniors, in four groups, who are trying to be active. The province gives, I think, \$80 per senior in those groups to help them stay

healthier, help them with exercise, the diets and other information they give to them. Certainly, these programs are good. This is another program that will just help a few more seniors stay in their homes. Aging at home is one of the—I think it was a \$1.1-billion program when it was introduced. Aging at home is extremely important. This will help.

I'd just like to read from the Drummond report: "Spending is neither out of control nor wildly excessive. Ontario runs one of the lowest-cost provincial governments in Canada relative to its GDP and has done so for decades. And we must recognize that some important steps have been taken in the past few years to help manage costs, improve our prospects for future economic growth and enhance services to the public."

I think this is part of the ongoing legislation that will help seniors in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to speak in regard to the Drummond report, like my esteemed colleague from Halton and my colleague from across the way from Ottawa–Orléans. It's a report card that's a failing grade, a major F; a \$16-billion deficit.

Mr. Chudleigh made a comment that Dalton has never said no to anyone, and I would suggest that he said no to the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound with the Green Energy Act, he said no to the people of rural Ontario with the whole Green Energy Act, and he continues to say no to the people of Ontario because of his inaction to make decisions that are going to bring this province back to where it should be. He also made a comment that one of the criteria was that no improvement shall increase the value. Well, I'm starting to now see the understanding of how they implemented their Green Energy Act, because there is definitely no value with the improvements that they supposedly are making.

I find it interesting that they bring a 15% supposed increase to seniors, although they leave out that their hydro bill is going to go up 46%. My mom, who lives in her own home on a very fixed income, is struggling with how she's going to make that 15% decrease pay off for the 46% increase. The math, just as you said in the Drummond report, does not add up.

I'm concerned about the billion-dollar boondoggle with that gas plant in Mississauga. Just think what we could have done for seniors, if we really wanted to help people stay in their homes, with that \$1 billion that has now gone to naught—a waste of money, a waste of time, a waste of energy.

I'm fully supportive of keeping people in their homes, and so are my constituents in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. We definitely want that to happen, but we need good plans in place that are going to allow that. It's great to have new door handles and new grab bars, but if they can't afford to stay in their homes, it's not going to do them much good.

Bill 2 is indicative of Liberal governance: Talk about grab bars and doorknobs instead of about job plans and

deficit reduction. We need this government to stand up and be accountable and do the right actions.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

The member for Halton has two minutes respond.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain.

To the member for Ottawa–Orléans, I'd like to thank him for his comments. I see that he was at the trough of the federal program, and that doesn't surprise me.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, of course, made some very good points in that the hydro costs are going to suck up any savings that the seniors might recognize under this program. The cost of health care is going to continue to increase. The costs of the municipal taxes are going to continue to increase, because they keep experiencing new costs because of the programs this government puts in place.

Mr. John O'Toole: New taxes.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: And the new taxes that this government brings in or fees that they bring in are going to suck up all those savings as well.

So the results of this bill are going to have a very negative impact on seniors across the province, and there isn't a more vulnerable or more deserving group of people that need help from the uncontrolled cost increases that this government keeps foisting on them.

It's a shame that this government continues to treat seniors in such a shabby way. It's disappointing. We're seeing seniors that are struggling to stay in their homes, struggling to stay above water as far as their costs are concerned, and it happens, it gets worse and worse, every year. Now to bring in a bill like this which is not really going to help very many of them or help them to any great extent while we have the unbelievable fiscal problems of this province is a diversion tactic. It's sad that the province has come to this, and it would be—thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Just actually reflecting back on the beginning of the session, the prior session, the winter session, post the October election, and what has transpired since, now we have this transformative Drummond report, the “What would Drummond do?” report, WWDD. What would Dwight Duncan do; that's what I want to know, not what Don Drummond would do.

But, you know, what surprises me is the work that potentially could have gotten done in between our sessions. They've got 362 recommendations out of Drummond. They squeezed 362: 362 at \$1,500 a day. So that's like a recommendation a day for a year.

But yet we couldn't even strike committees. They couldn't understand that they were in a minority situation and that the balance of power is no longer on that side of the House. So that's one decision, one realization, that they couldn't come to. It's right here with us.

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And my colleague is happy about that. There's one challenge that we've overcome. Now are you saying to us that we have 362 more challenges to overcome? Because I highly doubt that we will get through them.

So the question is, what is this trial balloon, potentially the largest trial balloon that we have seen? Is it a bait and switch? Is it the biggest, most classic example of that? What I think it is is a government that's out of ideas and has to outsource their ideas, like they do many other of their operations. Maybe they should create a department of ideas and bring in the brain trust there, because evidently there aren't any internally on that side.

What we're saying is that this idea here lacks substantially in addressing the true issue: that seniors, and particularly low-income seniors, need help. They don't need a token. They don't need a Band-Aid. They need real solutions to address the issues.

Those ideas typically come from this quadrant of the House, from the New Democratic side. I can hearken back to our good friend Roy Romanow, who sounded the alarm on our looming crisis and how it was important for us to deal with an Aging at Home strategy and a long-term-care strategy, to be putting money into that, that it was a good investment and that it was going to save you money in the future on your health care rolls. But those recommendations weren't heeded by the federal government at the time; nor do they seem to be picked up in any tangible measure by any government until the crisis is on the front doorstep.

We're talking about the stability, viability and security of our seniors, those who built this province, those who worked each and every day, paid their taxes, played by the rules, raised families, had small businesses, ran farms—the cornerstone of this province. What do we give them in return? What do we have to offer them? Potentially, if they spring \$10,000 on any home renovations, with some serious caveats attached, we can give them a \$1,500 tax break.

Well, it's clearly inadequate when your typical bathtub renovation is going to put somebody out \$3,000 or \$4,000, and ramping accessibility into a home, if someone requires a graded ramp, is another \$3,000 or \$4,000. These are substantial investments, at the same time we hear that our federal government's looking to reduce support mechanisms through the OAS. So there are signals out there. All levels of government are saying, “Hey, thank you for your contribution. We hope you had fun, but we're gone. We're out of the game when it comes to support. We no longer feel as though we have any responsibility to provide some assurances to you.”

That's sort of the broader scope of things. I'll go back to the Drummond report and its overall message of fiscal doom and gloom, financial gloom and doom and economic uncertainty. That's sort of the name of the game these days in a globalized, privatized, deregulated, militarized—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —consumerized, corporatized environment.

But, Madam Speaker, it's easy to make those assumptions, that it is strictly due to gross negligence from the public sector. What it's actually saying, what I think the interpretation is, is that this government doesn't believe or Don Drummond doesn't believe that Ontarians have the gumption to build their economy, to work, to be productive.

Come down to southwestern Ontario. Come to my riding and meet some of the farmers there, meet some of the folks who have been in the trades, the tool and die industry, that made the motor run, our economic engine—literally putting them together on assembly lines. Tell those people that they don't have the ability. Tell them that you don't believe in them. That's what the Drummond report is actually saying. It's saying that times are never going to get better.

And Drummond points out—I saw Steve Paikin in the gallery today. Drummond let slip—this is important for the members across the way to understand and to listen to. Drummond acknowledged that the reason that we will not return to any measure of certainty is because of the measures that were taken away through tariff protection. Don Drummond mentions right there on Steve Paikin's Agenda that the auto pact offered some measures of assurance for our manufacturing sector, which said, "If you want to sell it here, you've got to build it here."

But we're in a province nowadays where, you know—well, it's Caterpillar corporatism. It's vulture capitalists that are swirling around, looking at our heartland and swirling around the heartland of our manufacturing sector, knowing that we've built our industry with good, solid technology, workers that are productive, ready to come in, feed off of that intelligence, feed off of that good red meat, and then take it out of our jurisdiction. What do we do as a province? We entice them with corporate tax cuts: more, bigger cut, more corporate tax cuts, without any regard if they stay or not.

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My colleague across the way says that they're taking a measured approach with this particular bill in regard to healthy homes and that's why it's not so expansive. Wouldn't we wish that they took that approach when it came time to addressing corporate tax cuts and be strategic about it? I'm all supportive of helping businesses plant their roots here and helping entice investment, but ensure—can't you get it in writing that they're going to stay here for a while? That would seem prudent to me, and I know it seems prudent to those in my riding who are looking at the way that we spend our money here. A corporate tax cut is an expenditure, and we're saying to be prudent with it and have a keen mind on where you're giving our money away, because if those returns aren't going to be made, if those investments aren't going to be here in this province, then don't make them in the first place. Don't take the broad, across-the-board tax cut agenda that has failed us so far in so many ways.

We have serious reservations about the overall perspective of where this government is heading and its approach to providing security, providing safety,

particularly for seniors. We think this bill is really the least they could do. It is. It's the very least they could do.

A more pragmatic approach would be to do what Quebec has done, a jurisdiction that provides us with possibly a more progressive way to deal with supporting our seniors who require assistance and assisted living and assistive devices in their homes. They acknowledge that the lowest-income seniors require the most help and therefore they get a \$3,500 tax break, with the caveat that they have to hire skilled local tradespeople to do that. So they've already attached—there's the carrot and the stick there, and it's an approach that actually makes sense. Here you're saying that you've got to spring \$10,000 to get the maximum benefit out of this. And who does have \$10,000? These days, we know that it's slim to none.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to stand on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I'd like to just read clearly one of Mr. Drummond's statements in the executive summary: "Yet spending is neither out of control nor wildly excessive. Ontario runs one of the lowest-cost provincial governments in Canada relative to its GDP and has done so for decades."

I'd like to comment on some of the other quotations today. Actually, they're all very positive and they're very strong. The honourable member for Toronto–Danforth indicated, and I quote, "I don't have any problem creating jobs through ... construction." I agree with the honourable member: That's right and that's a spinoff of this seniors' bill, and we both agree with that, especially getting more trades out to work as quickly as we can.

Also, if I may, the honourable member from Essex may not be aware, but the figure for Mr. Drummond was not \$150,000; it was, in fact, half of that. He slashed his bill in half. I think someone in the press apologized for printing that information. Any saving is a welcome saving, and we thank Mr. Drummond for that.

Actually, the home of my parents and of many brothers and sisters—Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound particularly talked about jobs as a spinoff of this Bill 2, healthy homes, and I can tell you it's also very positive. It's so nice when you win with the bill and win with an additional spinoff.

The honourable member for Timiskaming–Cochrane—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to make comments as well on the member for Algoma–Manitoulin's comments, which I thank him for.

I too have done—

Mr. John Vanthof: Essex.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I thought he was Algoma–Manitoulin. He looks like the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Interjection: No, it's Essex.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I too have done the math, Speaker, and I find that this bill is really for a very small and select group of people.

The member before me spoke about the—I think he called it the wealthy home tax credit bill, as opposed to the healthy home tax credit bill, and I have to say that I agree with his comment. With our aging population, I think we can all agree that something must be done to support our seniors and to alleviate the financial stress that they have, especially the stress caused by their high energy bill. That said, the way it currently stands, this bill benefits a very small percentage of seniors with significant money in the bank for renovations.

My fellow member has also talked about the tax being \$1,300 on that \$10,000 for a rebate of \$1,500. I find that the comments that I heard over the 10-week break that we've had were not supportive of this.

I thank you for the time to speak on that, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

I rise to thank the member for Essex for having taken on this issue. I felt that in his remarks he talked comprehensively about the challenges that we're facing. It isn't just a question of inadequate support for our seniors; it's also a question of inadequate protection for the industry, the manufacturing, the jobs that our wealth depends on.

These are all integrated questions. If we allow foreign corporations to buy up Canadian companies and shut them down so that they don't have competitors against their home plants in the United States, then of course the money available for actually providing our seniors with health care, with support in their homes, with home renovation grants—that money's not there. A failure to actually take on those big-picture economic issues means, in the end, that we don't have the resources that we need.

It's unfortunate that that's the case. Caterpillar is a very powerful example of companies buying up resources—Canadian assets—solely to move jobs out of this country, out of this province, to another jurisdiction, impoverishing this province.

My colleague talked about the Drummond report. I think it's very important that people look at the Drummond report not only because occasionally one finds useful elements, but also because in many, many areas, the Drummond report didn't speak to real efficiencies but instead spoke to some of the—what can I say?—treasured beliefs of the Liberal government and tried to reinforce them, not actually improving our fiscal situation but providing that government with some sort of economic cover for a cuts budget that we expect to see soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is my pleasure to speak in regard to the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

I want to point out that this proposed bill would not only help seniors who live in their own homes—homeowners and tenants—but also will help families who have a senior living with them. Seniors and their families would be allowed to claim a refundable tax credit, as you know, of up to \$1,500 for expenses that are related to permanent modifications to their homes. But I want to make it clear that they do not have to spend the whole \$10,000. Sometimes it seems from the opposition we hear that you have to spend \$10,000. You could spend less; you can spend whatever amount you need to spend.

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I want to point out that for family members who share a home with a senior relative, this would be a great benefit. They would also be able to claim the proposed credit. This would be used, for example, to allow for a first-floor occupancy or a granny flat or an in-law suite. That would be very important. I know a lot of people in my riding, I know families, that have a senior living in their home, and this would make a great difference in favour of the senior.

We want to support seniors that are living at home and free up the health resources for those patients that are occupying those costly beds in the hospitals, but we will also have to think of the fact that if they're cared for by their family in their own homes, that is even better for the senior. This will also create jobs. We were talking about jobs just a few minutes ago. It will create over 10,500 jobs and support about \$800 million—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank all of the members who added their voices to today's debate and to my 10-minute intervention.

I think it's clear that both sides of this House feel that this bill is inadequate, and there are other models, other ways, and other issues, other problems, that this government is not dealing with, not focusing on. What I think and what I believe is that this bill essentially started with the title—"What can we put out there? What can we brand and how can we market it?"—rather than actually starting with the problem, which is that more and more seniors in this province are finding themselves at an age, post-retirement, frail, with physical disabilities, without the adequate resources and security and backstop to be able to live in dignity and with the respect they deserve. It speaks to the larger issue of the prosperity of this province and the direction of this province where our seniors aren't guaranteed—and I know that there are no guarantees in life, but you would expect that after 30 years or 40 years in a laborious job and employment, you could build enough of a safeguard to be able to make those expenditures and afford to live in a decent state of life.

What's unfortunate is that I believe that this bill will fall short for more and more seniors in this province. We

have a government that just will not recognize that and won't come to the table with tangible measures to address it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise here to support Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act. The Ontario government has made a commitment to programs that address the needs of Ontario families and strengthen the economy. The healthy homes renovation tax credit is a strong example of this commitment. If passed, the tax credit will help seniors stay at home longer, it will help family members that share a home with a senior, and it will benefit taxpayers by lessening the pressures on long-term-care home costs.

The tax credit will also benefit our economy by supporting over 10,500 jobs per year and by generating over \$800 million in home renovation activity. It is clear that Ontarians want programs that will relieve the burdens on senior homeowners and tenants. If the interest in the program is similar to the federal 2009 home renovation tax credit, up to 380,000 Ontarians would benefit from this tax credit this year. The tax credit program will relieve the burdens of our seniors, who will be able to claim up to \$1,500 for expenses related to modifications of their homes. These modifications include renovations that are essential to the safety and well-being of our seniors, including grab bars and reinforcements around the toilet, bathtub and shower areas, as well as pull-out shelves that enable seniors to work from a seated position.

As a former nurse on the front line, I know the importance of living at home. This renovation tax credit will ensure reduction of falls, which is a leading cause of death among seniors, Madam Speaker. These modifications will help our seniors stay at home independently longer.

For seniors living in a home in Scarborough–Agin-court, the benefits of this tax credit are very clear. Many seniors have difficulty getting up the stairs in two-storey homes. The cost of purchasing and installing a stair lift can range in the area of \$6,000. If passed, the seniors claiming this expense under the home renovation tax credit will be able to recover about \$900 off the cost of the renovations.

The tax credits will also make a difference in the lives of our seniors. Over the past nine weeks, I had the pleasure of meeting with hundreds of seniors living independently in my riding of Scarborough–Agin-court. I met with seniors at Shepherd Village community of seniors, St. Paul's L'Amoreaux seniors' centre and Mon Sheong Court. In my discussions with these seniors, I found unanimous support of the government's proposed home renovation tax credits for seniors. Furthermore, not one single senior expressed interest in living in a long-term-care facility, even though a number of them are well over 80 years of age and have various health care needs.

As a former front-line registered nurse, I believe that we owe our seniors the opportunity to stay healthy and to

live with dignity and independence in the comfort of their own residence as long as they choose. The government of Ontario is working hard to ensure long-term-care facilities are not the only options we offer our seniors.

In a 2008 policy brief for the World Health Organization, Peter Coyte, a professor in the department of health policy at the University of Toronto, and his two colleagues argued for the appropriate balance between institutionalized care and less intensive forms of care. The author wrote, "When an older person needs little care, providing care in their own home is probably more likely to enhance their health and well-being, and at less cost, than equivalent institutional care."

The author also noted that "integrated community-based care needs to move away from an overly acute" care, like hospitals, or institutional care, like nursing homes, and focus on "one that embraces managing and coordinating both the long-term-care needs and chronic illness of older people."

According to the research at the University of Ottawa, Canada admitted a higher proportion of the elderly population to institutionalized care than any other industrialized country. The 2009 Special Senate Committee on Aging final report on Canada's aging population stated that "home care and home support is what Canadians want when their health makes it difficult for them to manage the activities of daily life."

Given these findings, the McGuinty government's proposed tax credit ensures that seniors in Ontario will be able to spend their old age living healthy and independently in the comfort of their own home and familiar surroundings. The large increase in the number of seniors in our province, the predominance of women and the significant increase in older seniors mean that we must support an initiative that provides seniors with a variety of housing options, including this tax credit, which will help seniors continue to live independently in their own homes. The Ministry of Finance has projected that over four million, or 23.4% of the population of Ontario, will be seniors aged 65 and over by 2036.

The home renovation tax credit is exactly the kind of forward-thinking program we need. The tax credit is projected to cost about \$60 million in 2011-12 and will be fully offset by redirecting existing expenditures from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Ministry of Revenue. It will also save them money in the future by lowering the burden on long-term-care costs as our province's population ages.

Finally, it's also important to know that this government has a strong track record of supporting Ontario's seniors. Since 2003, the McGuinty government has initiated a number of programs that make a difference in the lives of seniors across this province:

The enhancement of energy and property tax credits for seniors is providing additional tax relief for 740,000 seniors to help them with their energy costs and property taxes. These seniors can get a maximum credit of \$1,025 annually;

Personal income tax—better known as PIT—cut costs. On average, 93% of income taxpayers getting personal

income tax cuts save about \$200 annually. Also, 90,000 Ontarians no longer pay provincial income tax.

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The Ontario sales tax credit provides an annual payment of up to \$200 for every senior, in addition to the existing GST credit.

The Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant allows that eligible senior homeowners will continue to receive additional assistance with their property taxes through the Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant. The government is providing \$1 billion over the next five years through this grant to more than 600,000 seniors with low to middle incomes who own their own homes.

Generic drugs: The government of Ontario reformed Ontario's drug system to facilitate lower generic drug costs, benefiting all Ontarians, especially our seniors.

Pensions and retirement income security: Ontario is leading the way in a national effort to review the state of the current retirement income system.

So, Madam Speaker, this particular proposed legislation is moving us forward together, and I want to conclude my remarks by saying that Ontario seniors have made significant contributions to this province in terms of the building of this province to where it is today. We have a duty to champion, to advocate for programs and services our seniors need and want.

More importantly, the proposed healthy homes renovation tax credit is an evidence-based program that is budgeted for 2011 and 2012. It will also stimulate the economy and job creation. That's the focus of this McGuinty government, and I ask each one of us, as colleagues in the House, to support this bill and to support Ontario's seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to stand here to talk about the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for her comments. I also note that something I didn't know about the member is that she's a nurse. I think all of us know in the province of Ontario that we are in a period of time where we have to make some tough choices—tough choices between various spending initiatives.

So the question I have for the member is—this tax credit is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. It's going to benefit some seniors, and certainly comments on this side of the House suggest that the seniors who are going to benefit are those who are wealthy. Are we better off making some tough choices, spending hundreds of millions of dollars on hiring more nurses, the profession that that member was at? That's the question I would ask her. And what helps seniors more, hiring more nurses or producing a tax credit of the nature that we are talking about here?

I don't really understand also why we're actually talking about such things in this House. I know it's a government bill and we're talking about all these things, but we just had a report last week, the Drummond report,

that outlined in great detail the fiscal situation, the fiscal crisis that this province is in. It's a \$16-billion deficit. If things stayed according to plan, we'd have a \$30-billion deficit by 2017-18. Why are we here talking about a bill in this House that simply asks to us spend even more money? Are we simply here talking about a bill that will get us to that \$30-billion deficit even faster?

I have a lot of questions about that, Madam Speaker, and I hope the member opposite and all members who are contributing to this debate focus on those questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt and to add to the comments of the member from Cambridge.

It's all nice for to us talk in this House about seniors, but I have a few questions because, yes, the healthy homes tax credit is going to help some, but what about the others? What about the seniors who can't afford not to fix up the bathroom but can't afford to stay in their house, the ones like some of them in my riding right now? Mining companies went broke on purpose to defraud the pension plan. They have no pension. They have no place to go. The wait is five years to get into a seniors' home in some of my towns. What are those people going to do now?

It's nice for to us to talk. It's also nice for us to talk about the Drummond report and all those recommendations. But to those seniors who are having to choose between electricity or food, you know what? They really don't care about the Drummond report, and they are here in this province. They are here in my riding; I'm sure they're here in other ridings. I'm sure all of the members—I know we all knock on doors, and I am sure we have all met them, people who have worked hard and who society has passed by. We should really be talking about what we are going to do to help those people.

We can all posture on both sides of the House, and we have forward-thinking programs. Well, let's do some forward thinking about those people because I'm sure we have them in all of our ridings. What are we going to do when they call me, and they're crying on the phone, "Where am I going to go?" I'm not going to tell them that they have to buy grab bars because that's not their problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate and to pass comments on the excellent comments that were made by my colleague the member from Scarborough–Agincourt on Bill 2, which I think all members of the House would agree is a practical piece of legislation.

We've all got people in our own ridings and communities that are aging. We have families who have aging members in those families. We have parents that are aging, and we have children, and we have grandchildren who want to assist in some way. Quite often, what that means is a change where the older person, the

older member of the community, will move in with their family, will move in with the children, will move in sometimes even with the grandchildren. Quite often what that means is that the house has to change a little bit. Quite often, along the aging process, there's been some changes in the mobility, perhaps, of the person involved.

This, to me, seems to be the sort of a bill that, in a very practical way, allows seniors that choose to stay in their own home, allows them the ability to help themselves, to change their own home, to put in something like a wheelchair ramp, for example, or a lift, or to lower the counters or to put in things like motion-activated lighting. All those changes that take place to all of us as we age can be accommodated if we make some of the changes that are envisioned by this bill.

But it also helps—as I said earlier, quite often families, and different cultures I think have different approaches to this, but quite often families have different approaches to how they look after the elders in their own society, and quite often the families themselves play an active role and will invite the parent back into their house. This allows, in a very practical way, for the government to assist those families in being able to look after the needs of the people who probably raised them in first place.

So I'd urge all members to support this bill. It's practical, it's well thought out, it's going to create jobs, and it's going pump about \$800 million back into the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments or questions? The member from Nipissing-Pembroke-Renfrew.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, a lovely place, and I know you've visited there, Speaker. I saw you in Petawawa one time at a great show there, and I'm sure you'll never forget Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I certainly never will forget your visit there.

Look, we're talking about the healthy homes renovation tax credit here. This is just another example of how this failed government has done its business for the past almost nine years. It never bases anything on what is sound policy or good government. It bases everything on "What political game can we win today? What political group, what demographic group can we satisfy in order to further our political agenda and our electoral chances the next time we go to the polls?"

I'll tell you, Speaker, that is one sorry way to do your business. And what has it gotten us? This is an example of it. What has it gotten us after nine years of Dalton McGuinty's failed government here in Ontario?

Well, we only have to ask ourselves, what happened last Wednesday? We got a rude awakening from the government's hand-picked analyst Don Drummond. When asked, "What do we need to do to balance the books in this province by 2017-18?", the prescription was heavy. It basically said, "You've done it all wrong. You've created the master of messes, the mother of all

messes, and now you turn to Don Drummond to try to fix it."

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Folks, it is Dalton McGuinty's mess, and this is just more politicization to try to take the heat off what is a failed government. It's time for them to pack it in.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. The member for Scarborough-Agincourt has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the members from Cambridge, Nipissing, Cochrane, Oakville, and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke for your comments.

Let me remind the members opposite what they really read, okay? On page 22 of the executive summary of the Drummond report, it very clearly states, "All patients not requiring acute care should be diverted from hospitals to more appropriate care that will be less expensive"—less expensive, Madam Speaker—"improve the patient experience and reduce the patient's exposure to new health care risks.... Home-based care should be used more extensively." That's what this proposed legislation is all about. So unless the opposite member read the wrong Drummond report—then we could talk, okay?

We also know that the Ministry of Finance stated that by 2017, for the first time seniors will account for a larger share of the population than children aged zero to 14. Given these statistics, the government is doing the right thing. So I want to ask the member opposite, are you doing the right thing? Ontario seniors need to live, healthy and independent, in the community. The proposed legislation focuses not only on Ontario seniors but also their well-being and job creation. That's what the McGuinty government's about, okay?

So unless you read the wrong report—you have a right to criticize it, but we need to be here to champion our seniors because they have built this Ontario. We will continue to build this Ontario for a better Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to respond to Bill 2, or, as the government likes to call it, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act. When you say that name, it sounds pretty good. It uses some of the right words: "Healthy," "Credit" and "Act." This government has gotten very good at naming things to make them sound better or to hide what they're really doing.

Take, for example, the legislation that gave us the HST. Back then, the Liberals called it the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act. The name sounded great; the reality, unfortunately, not so much.

Bill 2 also says one thing but means another. The name suggests that anyone can qualify for a tax credit to renovate their home. That couldn't be further from the truth. The bill, as written, applies only to seniors over the

age of 65 who can afford to spend \$10,000 on very specific types of renovations.

During the election, people in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga told me time and time again that the cost of living in Ontario is becoming unaffordable. It's harder to make ends meet. They were vocal about the dramatic hydro rate increases over the past several years. They're alarmed at the prospect of an additional 46% increase over the next five years.

From Baden to Breslau, Kitchener to Elmira, everywhere I went, people expressed their dissatisfaction with Ontario's insurance rates, which are the highest in Canada. They were dismayed that despite promised tax increases for health care, services like eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services—preventive care—are being removed from OHIP coverage.

As the MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga, every day I receive letters, emails, phone calls and even messages through social media telling me the government needs to focus on priorities like job creation and getting government spending under control.

Folks in my riding are asking for help dealing with problems with the WSIB. They are asking for help protecting their right to choose the day care provider they feel is most appropriate for their children. They want a say in what happens in their own communities when it comes to the placement of wind turbines—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Harris: —like my colleague here from Prince Edward–Hastings, and biogas plants, among other things.

They're not asking for new government programs that cater to a very small niche. They don't believe that when government gets bigger, it becomes more helpful—in fact, very much the opposite.

People in Kitchener–Conestoga, as in the case of the other 12 ridings the Liberals lost in October's election—some of my colleagues are here today because of it—see a much greater benefit in programs that benefit the majority of Ontarians, like removing the HST from home heating and hydro bills. They'd rather be given a break on their day-to-day expenses than be sold on a government scheme that ignores those who need help the most while giving a break to a small percentage that don't need it.

The opposition parties don't always agree, but one thing we do agree on is the need for broad-based relief for Ontario families, not the very, very narrow relief proposed by this bill.

Every member of the Legislature wants to help seniors stay in their own homes as long as possible, but the problem with this bill is that people who need the help the most don't have the money to qualify for this tax credit. Has the Liberal government become so out of touch with the reality faced by many seniors that they actually believe a senior making \$25,000 will spend 40% of their income on home renovations to get less than 1% of their total income back? The McGuinty Liberals are

dreaming in Technicolor if they think this latest scheme will eventually help those it claims to.

What's more alarming is that, one after another, members on the government side have stood up to defend the math on this bill and to defend the rationale behind spending maybe \$64 million or maybe more, because no one seems to know how much this program will actually cost.

Last week the Drummond commission made it painfully clear: Ontario is in the mess we're in today because this government has failed to keep spending in line with revenues. The McGuinty Liberals have been such a colossal failure that we're now on the road to a \$30-billion deficit and a total debt of well over \$400 billion. Thanks to the fiscal mismanagement of the McGuinty-Duncan duo, Ontario is on the road to becoming just like Greece. And while this government has continued spending more than \$2 billion since the last election on key priorities like un-building the power plant in Mississauga—we all told them not to build it in the first place, the hole our children—in this case, my newborn, Murphy Harris—

Interjection: Congratulations. Way to go.

Interjection: One week today.

Mr. Michael Harris: —who is a week old, watching at home on TV, is now strapped with a \$21,000 debt before he even took his own first breath, which is unfortunate. Our grandchildren and, yes, even our great-grandchildren, will inherit—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Harris: It just keeps getting better. Oh, he's finely tuned.

But with all the spin doctors the Liberals have hired lately, who I'm sure are now hard at work trying to save the Minister of Health from her scandal at Ornge, it's no wonder this government hasn't got a clue what average Ontarians face each and every day.

So the problem with this bill, as has been the case with so many other bills passed by the McGuinty government, is that it only benefits a very small percentage of Ontarians. What's even worse is that it ignores those who face a daily struggle to stay in their own homes as a result of this government's reckless spending and tax increases on life's necessities, seniors like Bill from Elmira, who I met during the election. Bill considers any type of home renovation to be an unaffordable luxury because he's having a hard time simply making ends meet.

But I think we're losing sight of the most important thing in this debate. In today's difficult economy, in a time when reckless spending by this government has left the cupboards bare, we should be asking ourselves what kind of government program will help the most people. If members on the other side of the House judged Bill 2 by this standard, they would have no choice but to agree with the majority in this place, members of the PC and NDP caucuses who know that if you want to help the most people, you do it by giving broad-based relief that not only a few people can afford to take advantage of.

You know, sometimes politics gets in the way of good decision-making. Liberal members on the government side often dismiss criticism of their record as just rhetoric. But even the Auditor General and now the Drummond commission have questioned the value for money spent on many Liberal spending programs just like this one.

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Unfortunately, as the *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Sun*, *National Post* and our friends even at the *Toronto Star* have reported, this government has dug Ontario a hole so deep that it will take austerity measures that have not been seen before in Canada to get this province back on track. To kick-start a recovery and avert Ontario's bankruptcy, the McGuinty Liberal government must declare a quarantine zone around the public purse—no more new, uncosted, one-off spending incentives like this one. If Dalton McGuinty declines any of Mr. Drummond's recommendations, a new idea to save money must be put forward in its place, and the government needs to act on the ideas put forward by the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, including a public sector wage freeze, introducing competition in public services and implementing pro-growth policies such as apprenticeship reform.

In the weeks leading up to the release of the 2012-13 Ontario budget, the government should be focusing on these priorities, not looking for ways to spend more monies we don't have on new programs that offer questionable results.

Thanks to this government, Ontario is no longer the economic powerhouse it once was. Now we have yielded that title to Alberta, Saskatchewan, BC and even Newfoundland. If Ontario is ever to regain our economic strength, if Ontario is ever to again become the destination of choice for new immigrants, we need to get our fiscal house in order. This government must start spending taxpayers' money more carefully.

It's time the McGuinty Liberals stopped acting like they still have a majority. It's time for the Premier and all members of cabinet to listen to the new majority in this Legislature: those seated on this side of the House.

We all want to help seniors in our communities and across our province. In my view, voting against this bill is the best way to support every Ontario senior. It's the only way we can pressure this government to work with the opposition to provide real relief for seniors. For these reasons, I cannot—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: I listened intently to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. He made some good points.

I personally have a major problem with this \$10,000 rebate, if you want to call it that, on home renovations. Let's talk about the HST on it. That's \$1,300, and they're going to give you \$1,500 back, so you're \$200 ahead there. But then you had to borrow the \$10,000 from the bank, because you don't have \$10,000. So with the interest you paid on the \$10,000 from the bank, now

you're down \$200. When the government is trying to do things that are going to help people, you might want to start by taking the HST off.

They also forget that in different parts of the province, building and material costs differ up north for types of wood or different things that are required, or even in the south, depending on what you're doing to the house, whether it be brick work, a new roof, whatever you need. Costs change all over the province. Probably, the further you go north, the costs are going to be more, so you've lost there again. In fact, I think this \$10,000 credit is going to end up costing them about \$5,000. So I really don't think it's doing much.

Take the HST off it. Take the costs that they have to pay to the subcontractors to do the business—you forget about that: The contractor is going to charge you HST on his service, too. So you might want to take the HST off the contractors who are doing the work service, too. Then it might work.

I don't think, when this government does things, they take everything into consideration. I don't think this government takes a look at the big picture or even the details, obviously, because this is an absolute joke. It's not going to work, and it's going to cost them more than—and I don't even think some of the people can borrow the \$10,000. I don't think the banks will lend it to them. Good luck.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I think we have to keep this particular piece of legislation in its proper perspective. It has nothing to do with the global economy, the federal economy or the economy of Ontario. It is strictly trying to help our most needy people, our seniors, that I believe everybody wants to support. The fact is, even the smallest assistance that we can provide our seniors would go a long way in keeping our seniors living comfortably in their homes. We are not talking \$10,000; we are saying tax rebates up to \$10,000 of expenses.

Madam Speaker, to a senior, even widening the opening to their bathroom would be a huge assistance and would bring some benefit to that senior, to continue to live in their own home instead of being forced to go into a nursing home, where it costs a lot more money. The intention is—and the heading of the bill is very clear—to provide some assistance and tax rebates to seniors who can afford it but need some assistance, some help, to continue to live in their own present residence. What a wonderful thing to do for seniors who want to stay in their community, in their home, with some minimum expenses. They don't have to go and borrow money, and if they do, they would have to go to a family member for assistance, but we are talking about maybe even lowering a drawer so that they can reach it from a particular wheelchair. So let's look at the bill for what it is, let's not read more than what it is, and I hope that at the end we can all support our seniors in our own individual ridings. I thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you, Speaker, and I just wanted to say congratulations to my good friend from Kitchener–Conestoga, the MPP, on the birth of his son Murphy. Congratulations to the member and to Sarah on the birth of their son. It must be an exciting time. On behalf of all the members, we wish you all the best.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga and I go back a few years. We both ran in the 2007 campaign. We arrived here four years later, and now we're here to hold to account the most fiscally irresponsible government in Canadian history. I can tell you, Speaker, without a doubt—again, as I said earlier here today, the number \$411 billion is staring us in the face. In 2017, that's what the debt could rise to in the province, and we see the government on a reckless spending spree: again, \$2.5 billion in new spending outlined in the throne speech. We have Bill 2, which is going to cost millions of dollars. The government can't help themselves. I mean, they're just addicted to spending, and again, they're just extremely irresponsible. I know I'm hearing in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex that we need change, that we need a new course, a new direction. We encourage the government to listen to members on this side of the House, a fiscally responsible party, a party that's interested in future generations, the betterment of future generations. We want to get the fiscal house in order. We have courage, we have conviction, something that the Premier is lacking and his ministers are lacking.

So, again, Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, and congratulations again to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's nice to be able to comment on the members from Kitchener–Conestoga, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and with the two on this side I share something: I also ran in 2007. It took me two tries too. Something I remember from the 2007 campaign is that I ran against a cabinet minister from the other side, and in the debates he told me, told our people in the towns that were having a lot of trouble at that time, that resource extraction was a sunset industry, and we might as well get used to it because mining was over—four years ago, mining was over. Now in the throne speech and in the Drummond report, what is the shining light? The Ring of Fire.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, not thanks to Liberals—thanks to events beyond our control. But it just goes to show that there's not a whole lot of planning involved on behalf of the government, there really isn't. What we're supposed to be debating here, the wealthy home—no, not the wealthy home; it's the healthy homes renovation tax credit. Pardon me, Madam Speaker. I misspoke. I wasn't trying to make a pun here. For the people who can't afford to fix their home, who can't afford to pay—hydro rates are going to go up by, what, 40%? What are we going to do for those people? Are we going to say, a couple of years from now, "I guess seniors are just something we can't help"?

This is a huge issue we have to tackle. We have to tackle it in the north. We have to tackle it in the south. We have to tackle it all over with real legislation, not just fancy titles.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues the members from Timiskaming–Cochrane, York West, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and my good friend the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who, yes, said some nice words about our new family. Big brother Brayden, of course, will be watching on TV as well, but thank you for those. We did run in 2007 together. We're here to, again, hold this government to account.

I think one of the most troubling things we heard was how the Conference Board of Canada has recently reported on the fact that we're in a \$16-billion deficit, a \$252-billion debt. That's to grow, and even double, up to \$30 billion, a \$400-billion debt. In fact, as I was out in my community of Kitchener–Conestoga recently, I was telling people how, if debt was its own ministry, it would be the third-largest ministry, next to health and education. That's troubling; extremely troubling.

That's why I want to take the opportunity again to remind the government across the hall here how best to kick-start our economy and avert Ontario's bankruptcy that this government has got us in: with three measures. We're going to say, first: Declare a quarantine zone around the public purse—a big, big one. No more new, uncostered, one-off spending initiatives like this one; absolutely not.

Interjection: Focus like a laser beam.

Mr. Michael Harris: As Tim would say, focus like a laser beam. If Dalton McGuinty declines any of Mr. Drummond's recommendations, a new idea to save money must be put forward in its place. And the government needs to act on the ideas put forward by our PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, including a public sector wage freeze, introducing competition in public services and implementing pro-growth policies such as apprenticeship reform.

Again, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill today, and again another reason why we can't support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I was wanting just to put a couple of things in second reading on the debate for this particular bill because I think that this is going to be in committee, and there are a couple of things I was hoping that we were going to deal with. Do I support generally what this bill is trying to do? Obviously. This is motherhood and apple pie. Who doesn't believe that we should be helping seniors to retrofit their homes for whatever, be it for energy efficiency, be it in order to live more independently at home? Absolutely. I don't think

anybody in this House will disagree with the basic concept of the bill. So I don't have a problem supporting this particular bill at second reading.

However, I think there are a couple of things that I would like to see once we get into committee. One thing—and I don't mean to be partisan on this one, but I will be—is that the government is really good at making these kinds of announcements but not very good at getting the money out the door sometimes. So maybe one of the things we've got to do in this bill is to try to figure out some way that the government actually does what it says it's going to do in the bill, because there have been too many examples where initiatives have been announced by the government, and they have a big press conference ahead of time, and they have a big press conference a little bit into it, and they talk about this wonderful thing that they've done, and then nothing comes of it. So I think we need to have some mechanism to ensure that, in fact, the seniors get the benefit that we're talking about when it comes to being able to help those particular seniors at home.

It also gives me an opportunity to talk a little bit about the difficulty we're having *vis-à-vis*—we're all in agreement in this House that the budget should be balanced by 2017-18. All of us had it in our platforms in the last election, and rightfully so.

One of the things we need to figure out is one of the ways that we can save money. This bill, in a funny kind of way, can help us do that if we were to think a little bit more boldly, and that is, how many seniors do we have in Ontario that, given the proper support at home—and sometimes it's as simple as doing a retrofit in the home: having a ramp so that the senior can get in and out of their home; being able to have handles in the shower, in the bathroom; being able to have whatever it might be so that the person is able to live within their home and not be in a position of having to, unfortunately before their time, end up inside a long-term-care institution.

One of the things that maybe we should be looking at as we bring this bill into committee—and it will go to committee; I don't think that our caucus is going to speak to this bill very much more than I am now—is to take a look at how we can truly help seniors live independently within their home.

I'll give you a very quick story. I would use the name of the constituent, but she hasn't given me permission, so I don't want to use her name. All of us understand this.

Each one of us has had this happen in our constituency office. A woman who lives in Timmins—she's in her late 70s—is able to live perfectly independently at home if she can deal with the washing and the drying of clothes. Her condition, as far as arthritis—she's managed to sort of lick the issue of how to prepare meals and how to do some of the basic chores she has got to do in the house, but she cannot deal with the washer and dryer because of the physical set-up.

This particular person has asked a community care access centre to provide her with somebody to go to her home to do her laundry once or twice a week so that she

can live independently and not have to worry about, "Who's going to do my laundry this week?" She can't get the services because she doesn't qualify, because she's not sick enough, if you follow what I'm getting at. In order to be able to qualify for the services at home from the community care access centre, you have to meet a certain threshold. Because her threshold is not as pronounced as it could be, or as it should be in order to get the services, she's not getting anybody coming to her home to assist her with doing her laundry.

Well, imagine if we can amend this bill so that this particular woman can say—okay, it's a question of doing something physically in the home so that she can get to her washer and dryer. Her washer and dryer are in the basement. She's got arthritis in her knees; she's got arthritis in her hands. She can't get down the stairs. She fears, going down the stairs, that she will fall and hurt herself, and in fact, that's what could happen. Imagine if she does fall. The catastrophic cost to her, as an individual and a human being, is awful, but for a medical system, it's even more expensive, because then you'll have to take care of somebody in a much more pronounced state of a health crisis. Who knows? Maybe that person's going to end up in a long-term-care institution because the injuries might be such that she can't return home and live independently.

So imagine if we can use this money, use this tax credit, in some way that allows her to retrofit her home in some way so that the washer and dryer can be on the main floor, where she can get at them and not have to worry about falling down the stairs when she goes down into the basement to do her washing and drying.

These, I think, are some of sort of the practical things that we need to look at, not just in this bill but as we look at our health care system, about how can we support people at home so that they don't need to have the services of a hospital or a long-term-care facility to be able to survive.

There is a really interesting report that I read—I don't remember what Scandinavian country it is, but I remember it was one of the Scandinavian countries. They actually passed legislation that prevents them from building long-term-care beds, something we would never do in Ontario, because Ontario's not at that point in the development of community care. Their point is that if you build a long-term-care bed, then you've got to put somebody in it. They're saying, "No, let's put all of our emphasis on making sure that we can have people live at home and live at home independently." Rather than putting money into the long-term-care bed, they're putting money into the community so that there's a nurse who can go over and care for the person when it comes to their medical needs and so that if you need Meals on Wheels or whatever it might be, in fact those types of services happen.

If we are able to look at that, and we're able to make that sort of shift—we've already started. To be fair, Ontario, under all three governments—NDP, Conservatives and Liberals—has been moving in this direction

over the last 20 years, but we haven't taken it home yet in the sense of we've not gone probably as far as we should have.

I just want to give one other example, a phone call that I got from my sister today, and I can use her name because she's my sister, and she's given me permission, I'm sure. My sister suffers from schizophrenia. She lives at home independently and does quite, quite well. She is coping amazingly. She takes her medication; that's two thirds of the battle with these types of diseases.

But she's got some physical restrictions. She's starting to have some problems as she gets a little bit older. She's starting to have some problems trying to survive at home. One of the things that we went through at Christmastime and now is that she, for some reason, has something going on with her leg that they haven't quite figured out, but she's not able to stand.

The amount of work that she had to through in order to get something like Meals on Wheels brought into her apartment so she can stay at home independently was quite complex.

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Here's a fairly functional person. My sister is quite functional. She has a brother who understands the system because I advocate on behalf of people all the time. So I could tell her where to call and what she had to do. But, imagine you're the person who doesn't have those skills and doesn't have somebody who understands the system. That person would still be eating basically takeout food and eating foods that are probably no good for you because you wouldn't have the ability to even know how to draw down the services from the CCAC. That's the other part of the problem.

In the case of my sister, lucky for her, Louise is very functional. We're able to advise her. My daughter is a nurse practitioner, one daughter works in the community, in social services, and I do what I do. We were able to advise her so that she does what she does, but I would bet that about nine out of 10 families probably don't have that type of support system, and so people go without services that they're entitled to because they don't even know where to pick up the phone and call.

I look forward to this bill going into committee. I know that our caucus will be interested in making some amendments to this bill that we hope the government will support because we think there's a way of taking this bill to the next step so that we can actually do some of the things that are intended in this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to thank the members from Timmins–James Bay, Timiskaming–Cochrane and Kitchener–Conestoga for their comments.

I'm going to begin by framing this whole debate by the fact, as the member from Scarborough–Agincourt earlier mentioned, that by 2017 there will be more people over the age of 65 than children under the age of 14. That's a historic shift in our demographics, and we have to think of a new way of how we're going to take care of

an aging society. And certainly, building long-term care endlessly is not part of the solution. What our research shows is that today's seniors are living longer and healthier than ever before, and they want to live as long as they can in their own homes. That is what this bill is all about.

What I've heard in the debate today is that the NDP is saying that this bill doesn't go far enough, and what I'm hearing from the Conservatives or the PC Party is that this is a waste of money. The reality is somewhere in the middle, which is usually the Liberal ground, and I'm really proud of the fact that we're going to come up the middle with a solution that I hope will work for everybody.

In particular, I really appreciate the constructive comments that I got from the member from Timmins–James Bay because instead of just criticizing, he actually told us where he thinks we can make improvements. That's the way the dialogue starts, and I really appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased today to rise to give comment on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit brought in by the Liberals. We've heard lots of those nice words, "You should all be in favour," whatever. I've also listened to the debate and read the bill. What do seniors really need? How many people are you really helping over there? We've all heard from our constituents, like the member from Timmins–James Bay has said, about problems in the riding and helping seniors. There's only a small group of seniors that is actually going to be able to make those renovations. The tax credit, up to \$10,000—I don't have a lot of seniors in my riding who can put out that kind of money to do renovations and be able to stay in their homes. What we've heard from seniors is they actually need real care in their homes, care to stay in their homes, helping them with meals, shovelling off their sidewalks.

The government is very good at spin over there and says, "We're doing everything we can in our power to keep our seniors more at home." Well, we all want that, but we've seen from the last eight years that that really hasn't helped. They actually haven't done it. They've brought in some programs with some short-term successes. I will give a couple of successes that they've had, but in the long term that has not really helped seniors stay in their home.

Today, we're debating Bill 2, another bill nicely titled, this is all good, seniors happy—again, it might help a very, very small group of seniors. We have a lot of seniors, especially in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, one of the highest percentages in the province. They need real help. They didn't need the HST on their hydro bills and on their home heating bills taking money out of their pockets, forcing some of them out of their homes. What are we going to be doing with the seniors that we're forcing out of their homes? Where are they going to live?

There's a bigger policy picture that the Liberals are not addressing. Just these fluff bills like Bill 2 are not going to do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: Again, it's my privilege to be able to speak to this matter. There have been several great comments made today on this bill. I'm looking at this and, again, it's \$130 million of taxpayers' money that's being budgeted towards this. Who's going to be benefiting from this? A very small margin of seniors are going to be able to benefit from this.

Not many seniors in my riding are telling me that they have this disposable income. I'm not saying that this isn't an initiative that should be going forward because, yes, it is going to benefit many families, but what are we going to do about the families that can't afford it? The families that are once again falling through the cracks? Seniors have paid into these taxes all of their lives, and to be able to get a little bit back at the end of the day, they're not asking for much.

How many of them do we have eating out of food banks? They can't afford to pay their hydro bills. These are the kinds of initiatives that our seniors, that my seniors are talking to me at home about. Once again, they're worried about their prescription costs. They're worried about their pensions. Are their pensions even secure?

There's a lot going on out there in Ontario, and I don't think that a tax incentive such as this is enough for the everyday Ontarian. I think that we need to just make sure that when we are in committee that we are tweaking it to make it just a little bit better, that we're going to be able to include all seniors in Ontario in this bill and that we can make it better for everybody.

So again, thank you for allowing me to add my voice to this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes, the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill, the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I want to commend the member for Timmins–James Bay for his comments and open mind towards this bill on how, in his view, it could be improved. I think that's a very good sign, especially in this minority government. That's the kind of conversation we need to have so that we can improve initiatives and work together to help Ontarians.

I think there is a bigger picture element in this bill. Most of the comments that are being made are very limited to what this bill is trying to accomplish. But the bigger picture is what the bill is trying to do is keep seniors away from our hospitals and long-term-care facilities, and that's where the real cost is. The cost is not this bill. This is actually the very small measure to keep, even though a narrow number of seniors, as has been mentioned by the opposition—but all those seniors do end up then going to hospitals and taking up acute care

beds, which are very expensive, or they would need care in a long-term-care facility, which is even more expensive. We need to make sure that we do everything possible to keep them home because the cost is far more limited than it is in a long-term-care facility or in a hospital setting.

I think in this day and age with this kind of fiscal environment we need to ensure that we bring this kind of transformation so we can reduce the cost of our health care system as we work together to eliminate the deficit. This is what this bill is trying to do. I think we should stay focused on that aspect of it because this is going to be big.

I think my friend from Mississauga East–Cooksville aptly mentioned—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I apologize: I was all choked up, and I'm still choked up. I've got a little bit of a cold here.

I just want to thank the members for responding to what my few comments were on this bill. As I said, is this a bill that we can support? Obviously, you know, if we're able to do something to assist seniors, that's a good thing.

However, I just want to say again, the real difficulty is making sure the government actually does what it says in this bill. I think we need to have something in the end that ensures that the money that's announced does flow in some way so that, in fact, there's some mechanism to make sure that these tax credits are taken up in some way. I'm not sure how you do that, but that's something we have to look at in committee.

I just want to end, again, on the point that I think nobody in this House, from any side of the House, disagrees with the idea of how we're able to allow mechanisms to let people live in their homes independently, because clearly it's a heck of a lot more expensive to put people in long-term-care institutions or hospitals. If we can figure out ways to provide support so that people can live at home, I think that's a good thing.

Part of that support, obviously, is the services of the CCACs. Community care access centres are the ones that send the nurse, that send the homemakers, that send Meals on Wheels. Those services are often hard to get in our communities. Often people are having to make decisions of being institutionalized far sooner than they should because they can't get the services that they need to live at home.

In some cases, it's a question of making sure that we're able to renovate the home in some way—not renovate, but retrofit the home, that we can change the house in some way so that the person is able to live there and not have a lot of difficulty. I pointed out the one experience that I just saw recently where a woman is having to think about moving out of her home because the washer and dryer are downstairs, and she can't get down there with her arthritis and worries she's going to

fall and hurt herself or possibly severely injure herself. If we were able to use this so that she can have her washer and dryer on the main floor, that could be a good thing.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milligan, Rob E. (PC) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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