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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 27 February 2012

Lundi 27 février 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 February 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 27 février 2012

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome some community leaders from the riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. We have the mayor of Brooke-Alvinston, Don McGugan, and his wife, Anne; and we have Councillor Frank Nemcek, all representing the riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Brooke-Alvinston.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I would like to introduce and welcome Jerry and Jill Shields, the proud parents of Mackenzie, who are from the riding of Algoma–Manitoulin. Mackenzie is one of our proud and very good pages here in the House.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I take this opportunity to welcome Dan Newman to the Ontario Legislature today. In addition to being a former member of the House, he is also the proud father of page James Newman, from the great riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to welcome back to the Legislature Dan Newman, a former MPP and minister from the ridings of Scarborough Southwest and Scarborough Centre and, more importantly, the proud father of page James Newman.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome, later this morning, students from Dewson public school in the riding of Davenport. Dewson students have been very engaged in recent elections. They're very interested in our community, and I'm happy to welcome them later this morning.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today we're joined in the gallery by the Independent School Bus Operators Association. Attending with us today are Steve Hull, the president of the association; Vaughn Richmond; Roland Montgomery; Frank Healey; Lesa McDougall; and their executive director, Karen Cameron. Also with them are two operators: Eric Hogaschurtz and Rod Cook. Also, there is a member of the Independent School Bus Operators Association: Wanda Rothwell.

Mr. Speaker, ISBOA will be outside with 70 school buses circling Queen's Park to protest this McGuinty Liberal government.

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I have the privilege of introducing one of my dear friends. Lyndon George is in

the gallery with us today. Lyndon was a great help on my campaign, and now he's working in our leader's office in Hamilton, in Andrea's office. Welcome, Lyndon.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'm delighted to introduce the family of Barrie page Ruby Yee. Ruby is an outstanding student at Codrington Public School and a great role model in our community. Please help me welcome Sarah Uffelunanu, her mother; Irvan Yee, her father; Elliott Yee, also a former page here; Maris Uffelunanu, her aunt; and Fred Uff, her grandpa. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's my privilege to introduce Bev Craddock, who is my constituent, and Dr. Karen Somerville. They are here today to draw attention to the issues surrounding Tarion.

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

Just before we begin, I want to offer an apology. I did not have my book with me. I do know the Our Father off by heart, but I did not have the names of the other prayers, so I apologize to the House for my start of this morning.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, if you will, let me first say on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus that we extend our condolences, our thoughts and prayers to the families impacted by the tragedy in Burlington with Via Rail. We also commend our front-line emergency service workers and all of the volunteers in the Burlington area who came out to try to assist those going through that tragedy. Thank you, Speaker.

This is a question to the Premier. Premier, we have a debt crisis in the province of Ontario, and we have a growing jobs crisis at the same time. Mr. Drummond's report gets us a long way to addressing the debt crisis, but what he leaves out is the jobs crisis in our province. We in the Ontario PC caucus believe that in order to create jobs in Ontario, to make us a leader again, we need to continue to lower taxes on employers, on job creators in the province of Ontario.

So a simple question to the Premier: Premier, will you continue with the current schedule to hit a 10% business tax rate by July 1, 2013?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, if I may, I too would like to second the sentiment expressed a moment

ago by my honourable colleague with respect to the disaster that struck an Ontario community just yesterday. We extend our thoughts and prayers, particularly to the families and friends who lost a loved one. We, too, commend all of our emergency response people, our first responders, for performing heroically under very difficult conditions, and of course we look forward to participating with the federal government in any way to ensure that we might draw whatever lessons we can to ensure that this kind of tragedy is not repeated.

1040

As to the question raised by my honourable colleague with respect to corporate taxes, what I will say at this point in time is that we're proud of the progress that we have made as a government in Ontario. We have consistently reduced the tax burden on our businesses. We have eliminated the capital tax. We have, several times now, reduced corporate taxes. We've adopted the HST, against the express wishes of my colleagues opposite. We have done a great deal to ensure that we have a—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I'm not sure the Premier answered my question directly. He seems to be hinting that he is now backing away from something he campaigned on just months ago.

Here's the problem, Premier; here's our concern: In the less than two weeks since Mr. Drummond's report came out, you've backed way from a number of his recommendations—\$1.5 billion for full-day kindergarten, the clean energy benefit, the non-teaching school staff, the cap on class sizes, the tuition grant. You've added on the home renovation tax credit, I understand, today. At ROMA you announced that you are disregarding Mr. Drummond's recommendation on municipal financing.

Premier, you're now at well over \$4 billion that you've taken off the table. At this pace, I don't know if any pages will be left at all in the Drummond report.

The concern I have is that you have two choices: to cut spending elsewhere or to increase taxes. Premier, are you actually going to increase taxes in the province of Ontario and break your own law passed last year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, Speaker, we won't do that. But what I can say is we're keeping our eye on the requests that we're receiving on a regular basis now from my honourable colleague or his colleagues with respect to new expenditures they would like us to make. Those include, for example, a new racetrack they're asking us to support funding for in Belleville, a new high school in Nepean-Carleton, a new university in Barrie and a new health care lab in Halton. They'd like additional money for new or expanded hospitals in Oxford, Burlington, Huron-Bruce, Simcoe-Grey and Perth-Wellington. They're asking us to invest in new highways or road funding in Parry Sound-Muskoka, Burlington, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Simcoe-Grey, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and Sarnia. The list, I must say, keeps growing for new expenditure requests from that side.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, Premier, you're taking us towards a \$30-billion annual deficit under the Drummond report. That means we would effectively be tripling the provincial debt.

The challenge we have, Premier, is that you've not announced a single initiative to try to get back to balancing the books. In fact, you've gone in the opposite direction and piled on some \$4.5 billion more. In effect, you're digging a deeper hole.

But the problem, Premier, is: I don't think the answer is your answer, which is to increase tax in the province of Ontario. I think in the midst of a jobs crisis that would be the wrong way to go.

So I'll ask you again a very simple and direct question: Will you maintain the goal of hitting a 10% tax rate on job creators by July 1, 2013, or will you effectively be having a higher tax rate at that point in time which will simply exacerbate the jobs crisis we have here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, I'm very proud of the progress that we've made in Ontario with respect to ensuring that we have a competitive tax environment. As I said, we've adopted the HST and eliminated capital taxes, and we have, on several occasions now, reduced corporate taxes.

We are now, after California, the second most favoured destination in North America for foreign direct investment. We created 121,000 new jobs last year. And my concern is—understanding that in a knowledge-based global economy, we all get that it's so important to invest in the skills and education of our people—why it is that my honourable colleague would deprive 250,000 four- and five-year-olds of the tremendous benefits of a great start in education, something that continues in terms of benefits through elementary, high school and post-secondary, and why he stands against full-day kindergarten for our youngest learners.

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, I just wish you'd be direct on this issue. In the answer to Ms. Horwath on Thursday, there was similar dissembling. Your answers to me have a degree of dissembling as well. Premier, just be direct; if you are not going to follow through, just tell us.

We've brought forward a motion in the House to be debated on Wednesday that says very clearly that we should continue to ensure that we hit that 10% tax rate in July 1, 2013. We believe that's essential to creating jobs in the province of Ontario.

Premier, there's going to be a vote Wednesday. You can say it now: If you're backing down on this promise, why don't you just tell us?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As my brain registered, the member did say something that was unparliamentary, and I'd ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I look forward to the debate, which I understand will take place during private members' hour, and I know that individual members will do as they feel is appropriate and responsible given our circumstances.

But what I will say is that we have worked really hard to strike the right balance between ensuring we have a competitive tax and regulatory environment and ensuring we have the continuing capacity to fund good schools and good health care. That's not a balance that is easy to strike, Speaker, but I would argue that we've gone a long way towards improving both our schools and our health care and the competitiveness of our tax environment.

In fact, Forbes magazine, only a few months ago, specifically said that they've now ranked Canada as the number 1 destination for foreign direct investment on the basis of tax measures adopted by the province of Ontario. So again, I think we're striking that right balance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, to make sure we are clear: It's not a private member's bill; it is a motion in the House, standing in the name of the opposition, to be debated Wednesday. It reads as follows: I move "that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reaffirms its support for the planned reduction of the business tax rate on Ontario's job creators to 10% by next year, to help get the nearly 600,000 unemployed" women and men in Ontario "working again."

Premier, we have a jobs crisis in the province. The last time you increased business taxes—I remind you, that was a catastrophic error in one of your earlier budgets—we lost 200,000 manufacturing jobs. The decline continues: 60,000 private sector jobs gone since election day alone.

Premier, you used to say you were in favour of this. Now you seem to be backpedalling away, just like you're backpedalling away from the Drummond report. Please tell us: If we're going to attract jobs to the province of Ontario, should we not consider lowering business taxes to reward employers in the province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, of course my honourable colleague in the official opposition says that the only thing we need to do would be to cut business taxes. My honourable colleague the leader of the third party says that the only thing that we need to do would be to increase business taxes. We think the truth lies, in fact, somewhere in the middle.

I recommend to my honourable colleague that he take into account the following, I think, very interesting fact: Last year, as we were coming out of the recession, Ontarians with a high school education experienced a 9,000 jobs net loss. On the other hand, our college and university grads experienced a 119,000 jobs net gain. That tells me that, apart from the tax debate, it's really important that we keep our eye on the skills and education levels debate. I think it's very important we find ways to support that, including supporting full-day kindergarten, where learning first begins.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, with respect, Premier, you know we've brought forward ideas to create jobs in the province, including modernizing our apprenticeship system to create 200,000 jobs in the skilled trades. We actually would put cabinet to the test, and if they failed to reduce the red tape burden by a minimum of a 30% reduction in regulations, I would dock their pay, and I'd dock my pay as Premier as well. We'd get the province moving. We would also end your massive subsidies to wind and solar projects that are being forced on communities across the province of Ontario and driving energy rates. So there's a comprehensive approach when it comes to creating jobs.

Premier, in November, you said, "These corporate tax cuts are in fact having an impact on the front lines. They will mean more jobs." Dalton McGuinty said that in the House on November 30.

You've changed your mind, Premier. I greet this, I guess, with sadness but not surprise. Please tell us the November Dalton McGuinty will carry through on supporting job creation and lowering business—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my honourable colleague once again, I appreciate his interest in the upcoming budget, but he'll have to wait for it to be presented in this House in order for us to get a good sense of what is going to be in there.

But ultimately, it's a matter of the values that inform our decision-making here. My honourable colleague opposite says that he's against full-day kindergarten. He's against giving our 250,000 youngest learners the best possible start they could have in their schooling.

1050

On the other hand, he's in favour of a \$345-million subsidy to racetracks in Ontario. That, I think, stands as a good point of contrast between where they stand and where we stand.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Chatham.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We think we're on good priorities, especially when it comes to health care and education, those two vital services which all our families and all our communities have got to be able to continue to count on.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before I begin, I also want, on behalf of New Democrats, to express our deep sympathies to the families of the people who were killed in yesterday's tragedy, as well as to all those people who were injured and experienced such trauma in Burlington, thanking as well those people who responded, both EMS first responders as well as volunteers who came out, and the people in the medical community who helped with

some of the victims. It was a terrible tragedy and one that, hopefully, we will not see again, because we will figure out what went wrong and make sure that that doesn't happen again in Ontario.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In a recent letter to the editor, former Health Minister George Smitherman writes of Ornge: "To suggest that this model didn't go to cabinet is just plain folly ... no piece of legislation goes directly to the floor of the Legislature without first going through cabinet."

Can the Premier confirm that Mr. Smitherman is correct in what he is saying?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question by my honourable colleague. Of course, any piece of legislation follows the appropriate and due process to ensure that we're in fact doing what needs to be done.

What I can say is that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has moved diligently and decisively to inspire greater confidence in our air ambulance system in Ontario, which we know as Ornge. In fact, I understand that just yesterday, at the time of this tragedy, Ornge was involved in airlifting the injured from that site. I commend those people again who work so hard and diligently on the front line.

My concern again is that the leadership let them down. That's why we sent in a team of forensic accountants. That's why we've turned that information over to the Ontario Provincial Police. That's why we have replaced the executive and we have replaced the board.

We very much look forward to the recommendations of the Auditor General as well, with respect to his findings there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Can the Premier confirm that he approved the structure for Ornge that exempted this new organization from freedom-of-information requests?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Before I respond to the question, I also want to acknowledge what we all witnessed in Ontario and, indeed, well beyond Ontario's borders yesterday when disaster struck. Our first responders—our police, our land ambulance, our air ambulance, our hospitals—all came together to work with one goal in mind and that was to care for the people who were injured in the train derailment in Burlington. I want to thank those first responders, and I want to tell them that we are all enormously proud of the work they do.

Speaker, what I can tell you is that—perhaps I will quote, actually, from Hansard. This is in March 2007, debating Bill 171.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I look forward to the supplementary, and I will carry on with the quote from Hansard then.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My final question in this round is, can the Premier confirm that he approved a

structure for Ornge that exempted this new organization from the requirements of salary disclosure?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can share is what I've already shared several times, but I will do it again. We believe that the agreement, as it was originally struck, was not strong enough.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do try "Order," and if it doesn't happen, you make me stand, and if you make me stand, you steal time from others. Please, carefully listen to the answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The agreement did not give us oversight of the for-profit entities that were created. We are now winding down those for-profit entities, and we are developing a much stronger performance agreement that will give us the transparency and the oversight that the people of this province deserve.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also for the Premier. When the Premier was establishing Ornge, why did he make it a quasi-private entity that would be exempt and would be able to hide information from this Legislature and from the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm happy to have the question, because I realize I did not complete the quote. On March 26, 2007, this Legislature debated Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act, and here is a quote: "I know that our party certainly can take some pride in what we have done in helping to create a world-renowned air and land ambulance service." That was the member—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland is warned.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —from Kitchener.

The same member referenced Dr. Chris Mazza, and said, "I have full confidence that this recommendation, which I support, this newly rebranded ambulance service, will continue to deliver the high-calibre care to our sickest patients in the province of Ontario."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Under the veil of secrecy, this agency has systematically squandered health care dollars on everything from well-connected Liberal lawyers to personal gyms and luxury hotels. Now we learn that \$25 million is completely unaccounted for. The Premier said that he's proud of the job that his minister's doing. Is he proud of the work that he's done?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have put a new leadership team in place at Ornge. The former leadership is out; the new leadership is in. Their first responsibility was to address issues related to patient safety. They have taken steps in that regard. They are now very closely looking at a range of financial issues. The entire board is focused on that. These financial matters, including the allocation of the \$275 million, is part of the ongoing OPP investigation. However, rest assured, I understand that the new

leadership team is able to account for that full \$275 million. I cannot speak further details because of the ongoing police investigation.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The facts remain: The Premier worked with the former Minister of Health to establish Ornge. He exempted it from freedom-of-information laws, from salary disclosure, from legislative scrutiny. The president of the Liberal Party of Canada and Ornge executives briefed the Premier's staff about what they had planned for Ornge. Now millions and millions of health care dollars—scarce health care dollars—have been squandered on perks and sky-high salaries, and \$25 million remains unaccounted for.

The Premier says that the Minister of Health shouldn't have to take responsibility. My question to the Premier is: Where exactly does this buck stop?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I take full responsibility for fixing the problems we have uncovered at Ornge. Let me tell you that not a day goes by where we don't learn more, and it underlines that we made the right decision when we put in place new leadership at Ornge.

As we move forward, we are developing a new performance agreement. The old performance agreement did not have the necessary provisions to prevent the change to the corporate structure that did occur at Ornge. At the time the performance agreement was created, this new corporate structure was not envisioned.

Speaker, we are moving forward. We look to the support of all members of this House to strengthen Ornge so that they can continue to do the work that we are so grateful that they do.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Health: In a letter dated January 19, 2011—that's more than a year ago—the former chair of the board of directors of Ornge informed the Minister of Health of the details of the ministry's performance agreement with Ornge and the new business ventures that were being undertaken. That letter confirms that an in-person meeting with ministry officials was scheduled for January 24, 2011, for the purpose of elaborating on that briefing document. Speaker, will the minister agree to provide us with a comprehensive list of the attendees of that January 24 meeting?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this weekend I took several hours to actually go to Ornge bases. I went to the Ornge base in Sudbury, Speaker; I went to the Ornge base in London, and I had wonderful conversations with the front-line staff at those bases because I wanted to hear straight from them what was going on. We hear about it in this Legislature, Speaker; I wanted to hear from the pilots, from the medics, the mechanics and engineers who look after the aircraft. I wanted to understand from their perspective how they felt things were going at Ornge.

I can tell you: Overwhelmingly, they are supportive of the decisions we have made to replace the leadership with people who are listening to their concerns and responding to their concerns.

I have to tell you, I urge any other member of the House to visit—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, it was a very simple question. What is the minister hiding by not letting us know who attended that meeting?

Now Speaker, I just sent a document to the minister, which is a copy of the schematic that accompanied the briefing document that was delivered to the minister more than a year ago. Copies are available for members of the Legislature.

I would ask the minister to tell us if she wasn't even slightly concerned after seeing the complex web of corporate entities, holding companies, real estate companies, trusts, guarantees, pledge agreements, US corporate entities, head leases, subleases and charities that are part and parcel of that schematic that she's looking at now. Was that not enough to ring the bells that something devious was going on in this organization?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it was precisely—*Interjection.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order. Your warning.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It was precisely because there were concerns raised about the structure of Ornge, about our inability to get information from Ornge, Speaker—the ministry officials had trouble getting information. The Auditor General of the province of Ontario was unable to get information. Every request for information was met with a minimalist response. There was not the spirit of co-operation and collaboration that we expect from our providers, from our partners in delivering health care. And it is precisely why, after giving the process time to work—it wasn't working—that is exactly why I called in the senior leadership of Ornge and told them to provide us with the information that the—

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

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: To the Minister of Health: It has been nearly a year and a half since New Democrats began asking questions about Ornge. We now know that the waste of scarce health care dollars at Ornge was rampant and reckless. Health care dollars were being used for seven-figure salaries, for private chefs, gym memberships and for fees that found their way to the Liberal Party president. We're now hearing that Ornge has lost nearly \$25 million.

Madam Minister, where's the money? Where is the money?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would simply caution members of this Legislature to respect the OPP

investigation that is ongoing. I said in an earlier question that that is the work of this ongoing investigation, and I think we all want to see justice done.

What I can tell you, Speaker, is: The people of this province want me to fix the problem, and that is exactly what we are doing. We're bringing in a new performance agreement. We not only want to fix the problem that we found; we also want to make sure it never happens again.

I have said many times: The original performance agreement did not provide us with the ability to get the information that the people of this province deserve to have. That's why we're going to bring in a performance agreement that will have much more transparency, much more oversight, Speaker—and we will bring in legislation that will provide for a patient advocate at Ornge. It will—

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Mr. Speaker, it's not about taking responsibility for fixing the problem; it's about taking responsibility for creating it in the first place. Twenty-five million dollars of money diverted from front-line health care are missing, and the minister has no answers.

Sadly, that's only one of an endless number of examples. Last week it came to light that family members of Ornge executives quickly rose through the ranks, and Ornge is still paying for one of those family members' \$90,000 MBA. Why is it that when there's a choice between helping well-connected insiders and investing in front-line care, well-connected insiders always win with this Liberal government?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, that's an allegation that I simply must take exception to. However, let me talk a little bit more about what I heard when I spoke to front-line paramedics and pilots and those people who maintain our aircraft.

They are enormously dedicated, well-trained, passionate people who are doing a great service for all of us. I can tell you that they are very pleased that they are now being heard. They are very, very pleased with the changes they are seeing, the changes in direction, the changes in policy. They are enormously optimistic about the future of Ornge. They want to do their jobs. They had felt stifled in that, Speaker, in the past. But even in the short time that we have had new leadership at Ornge, they are feeling very optimistic about the future, and I want them to know that we are listening and we are responding.

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Interjection: Is this on robocalls you got during the campaign?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd like to talk about that sometime.

The supply management sectors of agriculture are a major economic driver in our province, helping keep our rural communities strong and vibrant. The federal government has dismantled the Canadian Wheat Board and

has stated they're putting everything on the table when they're negotiating the new Trans-Pacific Partnership, a new trading bloc including the United States and Japan. This has farmers and the supply management people in Peterborough extremely worried.

The supply management system has a proven track record of protecting Ontario producers, as well as processors and consumers, from extreme market fluctuation. Could you please provide the House with an update on the province's position on the future of supply management in Ontario?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that great question. He's absolutely right: Supply management has in fact stood the test of time. It has led to both enhanced stability and prosperity in the agricultural sector. So this government continues to be strong supporters of the supply management system because we understand that it's the very best way to manage several significant sectors of our agricultural economy.

There was a House resolution, too, by the way, I think, when the last government articulated this. That was forwarded to the federal government. I think, by the way, that resolution of the Legislative Assembly has had some significant impact with respect to the attitudes evolving from the federal government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the minister for that very comprehensive and detailed answer. It's good to hear that our supply-managed farmers can have confidence that the government of Ontario is in their corner. Can you tell us what steps Ontario has taken to show support for our supply management commodities?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I was so caught up in the compliment, Mr. Speaker, that I didn't catch the whole supplementary, but I think the spirit is very, very clear.

We count on our agricultural sector, which is one of the most significant and successful sectors of our entire economy, to be there when we need them, and I think the agricultural sector deserves nothing less than to know that this government will be with them when they're needed as well. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of our record. I'm proud of the people in the agricultural community, who produce so much; who produce the best products, the most nutritious products and the safest food anywhere in the world.

1110

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier insists that the Minister of Health should not be held responsible for her lack of oversight of our air ambulance service because she was lied to. While that may be the case, the performance agreement between the Ministry of Health and Ornge clearly states that the ministry, on behalf of the government, had a standards-enforcement and oversight role over the not-for-profit ambulance service of this province. The minister was reminded of that oversight role more than a

year ago in that document that she received, and yet, no oversight was ever exercised on the part of the Ministry of Health over that ambulance service. We want to know: Why not, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think that there is complete agreement that the original performance agreement did not give us the tools we needed to provide the oversight. The Auditor General himself has indicated that the old performance agreement was not strong enough, and he is advocating for a strengthened performance agreement. Unfortunately, one of the provisions of the old agreement was that we could cancel the contract with them, but it was a three-year process.

So clearly, the performance agreement was not strong enough. That is why we are moving forward with a new one, with much stronger oversight. It will require the ministry to approve any change in the corporate structure so this will not happen again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, what the minister has just proven is that she has never read that agreement and she doesn't know what's in it. The fact of the matter is that that performance agreement did not give oversight over the for-profit entities. It very clearly states that it does have oversight over the not-for-profit sector of the air ambulance service.

My question is this: That briefing document of more than a year ago was copied to the Premier's principal secretary and two of the Premier's policy advisors: the three most trusted advisors to the Premier. It was also copied to the Deputy Ministers of Finance, Health, Infrastructure, Economic Development and Trade and the director of emergency health services. Not one person amongst that entire list clued into the fact that this organization was out of control and that someone in the chain of command should sound the alarm.

I ask the Premier again: If he doesn't want to hold the Minister of Health accountable, who will be held accountable?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Member from Oxford, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I accept full responsibility for fixing the problem that has been revealed, Speaker.

I do have the performance agreement here. It's 150 pages long, and what I can tell you is that the Auditor General—the member from Newmarket–Aurora might not trust me on this, but I do believe he trusts the Auditor General—is advocating for a much stronger new performance agreement. He is on record as saying the existing one does not give the required oversight. I'll take it from the Auditor General before I'll take it from the member from Newmarket–Aurora any day.

NUCLEAR POWER FACILITIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Ontario hydro bills are skyrocketing due to

everything from the politically motivated cancellation of gas-fired power plants to the costly and deeply flawed smart meters. A report released last week by the widely respected SECOR Group says that the cost of building and operating idle and underutilized power plants is \$1.5 billion per year.

Minister, can you explain why this government is proceeding with two new nuclear units at Darlington when there's such an oversupply here in Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much. Speaker, we're determined to have the reliable energy that families, farms and businesses need: clean, reliable energy. We know where we were in 2003: burning coal; lights out; diesel generators on the street corners. The people of Ontario have been working hard the last eight years to rebuild the system. Unfortunately, that has a cost. That has a cost for work that wasn't done during the time of the two opposite parties. But families have been doing that work. We've got a reliable, clean system that is supporting good jobs in Ontario and placing us well for the good jobs in clean energy in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, it's very clear that this minister can't defend the numbers—it is very clear. An extra \$1.5 billion annually in unnecessary charges to home energy bills: That adds \$100 a year to the typical home energy bill, all because of the cost of selling surplus energy at below-cost prices and operating unused and underutilized hydro plants. Now this government wants to add billions to our hydro bills by proceeding with the unnecessary Darlington reactors.

Why does this government, why does this minister insist on sending our hydro bills through the roof by building these unnecessary plants?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I say, affordability is absolutely something we're focused on, as is reliability. We have been rebuilding the transmission system: over 5,000 kilometres of line. We've been bringing on the generation that the party opposite allowed to slip away. We're making sure that families, farms and businesses have the reliable source they need. Nuclear has long been part of that power, and we're determined to make sure that we have a stable source of baseload power, of which nuclear has been a part; it's about 50% now. If my friend had his way, maybe he'd turn off half the lights and shut down half the jobs. We're determined not to do that, not to kill the 80,000 jobs in the province of Ontario, which are the best nuclear power system in the world.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy. With the FIT two-year review well under way in the province, many of my constituents want to see a prosperous microFIT program that can help farmers participate in clean energy but at the same time earn extra income. I know that farmers who are participating in the clean energy economy are able to earn up to \$10,000 a

year from clean energy. This is helping them and the Ontario economy.

Minister, what is being done to ensure that the microFIT program will continue to benefit Ontario's economy and support farmers?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans specifically for the question, because he recognizes, as we all do, that farmers have long been great stewards of the land, and very protective of the environment. It is their future; it is our future.

Farmers across this province have embraced green energy and they have embraced the microFIT program. They have recognized that they can not only contribute to us getting out of coal, protecting the environment and cleaning the air, but they can earn funds at the same time from participating in the microFIT program. For example, Dick Netherway, a Vineland farmer, has recognized that the microFIT program is a very stable source of revenue.

It's the coming together: clean energy, clean energy jobs, cleaning up the environment. We're working together, supporting our farmers. Why won't the party opposite do the same?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister. I know that my constituents are pleased to hear that Ontario farmers are a priority for this government.

In addition to farmers, community groups and families are also benefiting from Ontario's clean energy economy. Not only are they able to participate through microFIT projects, many of them are also seeing other economic benefits from projects being built across this great province.

As projects are constructed, there are numerous companies and skilled workers whose services are needed to complete the projects. This is supporting jobs and economic activity in communities across our province.

Minister, can you please tell us about the clean energy supply chain and the various industries that are benefiting from clean energy in Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You know, my friend is absolutely right: As we clean up the air and bring on clean energy, we're making sure that we create jobs right here in the province of Ontario—20,000 jobs already; on track for 50,000.

Another report identifies Ontario as one of the top seven countries in the world for clean, green energy companies. Just think, Speaker: These jobs affect every part of Ontario. They affect farmers, archaeological technicians, acoustic engineers, field technicians, drill crews, environmental engineers.

1120

The party opposite talks about apprenticeships, but apprenticing for what? You won't support the very jobs they'd be apprenticing at in order to become journey-persons. It's time the party opposite stood up for the jobs in the province of Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question? The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members on both sides would do better not to yell. And, second of all, the member from Thornhill has the floor, and I wish his own members would not heckle while he's trying to ask the question.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Premier, we have brought to your attention serious accountability and oversight failures of your government and your Minister of Health with respect to Ornge.

Let me remind you of your own words back in 2000 when you were in opposition and questioning a minister of the crown: "Now you are telling us that you weren't aware in any way, shape or form of some very substantive work that was being done on your watch by your ministry officials, a very far-reaching and ambitious plan? Why do you get the extra money? Why do you have the car? Why do you have the driver? Why have you got the job? Why have you got the title if you can't even keep track of what's going on inside your own ministry? I ask you, then, if you don't know this is going on, then why don't you just resign?"

Premier, will you apply those same standards—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, as you unsurprisingly know, I will not. Just—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is warned.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So things have changed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: If we might be factual, the minister has indicated, I think several times over now, that we did not bring the necessary oversight to bear, that the original agreement was not strong enough—

Mr. John Yakabuski: So you've changed your view on accountability?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I gave you a warning, in the middle of that. You're named.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not good either.

Mr. Yakabuski was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to tell all the House: When I warn, it's one.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As I was saying, the minister has made it very clear that the original oversight was inadequate, that we failed to bring the necessary accountability measures to bear. She has taken, I believe, decisive and diligent steps. We have brought in a team of forensic accountants. We have turned the matter over to

the Ontario Provincial Police. We're going to be bringing in tougher rules by way of new legislation. I believe that's the responsible thing to do, and the minister will keep acting responsibly, I'm sure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It is clear from the Premier's answer that this government specializes in looking the other way. The Ornge issue is not the only example.

How can Ontarians trust in anything that this government does when the Premier will not hold his cabinet to the same standards that he has outlined for others? His Minister of Health did not do her job in overseeing Ornge.

I ask the Premier again: Will he do the decent thing? Will he hold his cabinet to the standards he has demanded of others? When will he demand his Minister of Health resign?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can appreciate that while acceding to my honourable colleague's request would serve his political interests, I think our responsibility here is to stand for the public interest, and I draw the distinction between the political interest of the party opposite and the public interest, which we are required to uphold here in government.

What does the public interest demand in these circumstances? I would argue it demands a couple of things, very importantly: Number one, ensure that the minister takes all necessary steps to ensure that this does not repeat itself, and if any money has been lost, to recapture that money so that it's back in public hands; secondly, to ensure that this minister continues to execute our health care action plan. It's a very big undertaking. This minister has acquired a tremendous amount of information. She's moving with passion and energy to carry out her responsibilities.

WASTE REDUCTION

Mr. Jonah Schein: This question is to the Minister of the Environment. Today there's another news story on how the McGuinty government is continuing to drop the ball on environmental protection, allowing hazardous, waste-producing companies to pass the cost of disposal on to consumers and taxpayers; allowing retailers to charge consumers different eco fees for the same product; and falling far short of the targets for waste reductions that have been promised. When will the government finally fix its waste-reduction programs and stop making Ontarians pick up the bill for polluting companies?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Some day I'll ask the NDP critic what his stance is on this, because it's rather interesting to see that you would ask this question at a time when there are people out there, some on one side, who would say that municipalities should pick up the tab. That's something we should perhaps ask the Rural Ontario Municipal Association about, what they think of the Conservative plan to download the cost of that to municipalities.

But I can tell the member that we have made some significant changes. I am dissatisfied with the rate of diversion that I have seen over the years. I'm determined to see that rate of diversion increase dramatically, and I would say to the member, and I think he might agree with this, that producers should assume any cost there would be of diverting that waste from landfills in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: The government tries to put a Band-Aid on its failed waste-reduction policy every few months, instead of admitting that its approach of letting industry police itself simply doesn't work. Without strong government oversight and enforceable targets, companies will never willingly pay the cost of their hazardous products.

In 2009, the government launched a badly needed review of its waste-reduction act. Will the government finally release the results of this review and get on with making polluters pay?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, I can tell the member that we're already working on that. For instance, one of the circumstances that existed out there that I think caused some problems was the fact that people were projecting what the costs might be for those who were dealing with these products. I have given instructions that that change, through Waste Diversion Ontario, so that the actual cost be charged to those individuals.

But let's look at the total costs that are assessed to people. If you're a company, you don't say on the bill that the minimum wage went up, so we're going to put that on the bill and charge an extra charge. You don't say that the transportation costs increased, so therefore, as a result of that, we're going to place that on a bill and ding consumers with it. You don't say that if you have to put on a piece of pollution-abatement equipment, you're going to put that on an additional bill and force them to pay for it. That cost should be assumed by the producers of these products in the province of Ontario—

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

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services.

About one in seven people in Ontario have a disability, and it's anticipated to grow to one in five within 20 years due to our aging population. By 2036, the number of seniors is projected to be more than double the 2009 number of 4.7 million.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, passed by our government in 2005, continues to help create inclusion for everyone in Ontario, regardless of their abilities. Through you, Speaker, to the minister: Can you tell this House what the AODA does to help Ontario be more inclusive?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for his question. Members of this House should be very proud of the

AODA, which was passed unanimously by the Legislature in 2005. As members may know, the AODA is the first of its kind in the world, a modern regulatory regime in terms of accessibility, in terms of replacing a complaint-based process that we see in other jurisdictions. What we've done is reach out to talk to individuals with disabilities, people from all sectors of society, and come together with standards that we want to see adopted between 2005 and 2025.

January 1 of this year, the customer service standard went into place for businesses throughout the province of Ontario. What it calls on them to do is have a cultural change, where they try to think about and work with their employees to make sure that they are a more welcome and accessible business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Minister. I've heard from businesses in my riding of Don Valley East that they have some concerns about the costs associated with becoming more accessible. Through you, Speaker, to the minister: Can you explain how businesses can comply and what the economic benefits are for businesses that provide accessible services?

1130

Hon. John Milloy: As I mentioned in my first question, the standards that came into effect on January 1 this year were developed in full consultation and participation with the business community. Business owners know that making their store—their place of work, what have you—accessible is good in the sense of corporate social responsibility, but it's also good for the bottom line. There are, as was mentioned by the member, literally hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities in the province of Ontario, and businesses want to make sure that they are welcoming to those people so that they can frequent their business.

A recent study by the Martin Prosperity Institute said that making Ontario more accessible could bring in improvements of about \$1.6 billion in tourism dollars, and retail sales could grow by another close to \$10 billion.

HOME WARRANTY PROGRAM

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Too many Ontarians continue to discover heating, ventilation and air-conditioning construction defects in their newly built homes.

Tarion administers the Ontario new home warranty plan to ensure consumer protection against these problems. Nevertheless, new homeowners are often left to address these problems themselves. Tarion is ultimately accountable to your ministry, Minister. You have known about this systemic problem for years and you have done nothing to resolve it. Why are you leaving new homeowners unprotected?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: First of all, let me take this opportunity to welcome Canadians for Properly Built Homes to Queen's Park this morning.

Tarion's role, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that new homeowners in Ontario receive the new home warranty protection which they are entitled to by law. Tarion has an important responsibility: It is there to ensure that builders abide by the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act and steps in to protect consumers when builders fail to fulfill their warranty obligations.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, Tarion has paid out over \$190 million in claims from its guarantee fund and has one of the most comprehensive new home warranty programs in North America.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: We know what Tarion is supposed to do; what we're telling the minister is that they're not doing it.

The Ontario Ombudsman noted in his 2008 report that "while the ministry declines to intervene in individual cases, it has addressed systemic issues that have been raised through its oversight of Tarion." Since that report, Tarion has established the New Home Buyer Ombuds-person Office. Even so, this consumer concern persists, and your response to the systemic problem has been inadequate to non-existent.

Minister, to ensure new homeowners are being adequately protected, will you commission a full investigation today and finally, after 10 years, put this issue to rest?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member opposite that Ontario consumers are a priority for the Ministry of Consumer Services and our government. Mr. Speaker, also let me assure you that we have looked at the concerns that have been raised with the CPBH president. He contacted us. We are certainly in the process of responding to those concerns that have been raised.

We continue to provide, through the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, the steps and protection for consumers. We know there are some issues that have to be addressed, Mr. Speaker, and we continue to look into these issues with a plan to respond to them accordingly.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Families in Niagara are worried about jobs. In 2010, this government promised a million dollars in a grant to New Food Classics in Niagara, a packaged foods company which would create more jobs in the region of Niagara.

But last week, this company once again went into receivership and locked its workers out. When the government handed this money out, did it extract any job guarantees?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, we were very, very pleased as a government to help New Food Classics. They were a Calgary company that had an idea, a good idea, that they wanted to invest in Ontario. I don't know if the member opposite knows this, but there is a process that's in place to review applications and to do due

diligence. The company provided their information in good faith, and we did the due diligence analysis in good faith. And as fate would have it, sometimes these things don't work out.

I think it's important for us to always footnote and lament the loss of jobs any time something like this happens. But what we never want to lament is being willing to stand with and take the occasional risk when we have good reason to believe it's going to benefit the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Government financial statements show the province gave this company \$900,000 last year. That was supposedly in return for the company relocating from Calgary and creating new jobs. But now, once again, in Niagara, 120 workers are out of work.

Kate Jones, the unit plant chair, said, "We made a lot of concessions. And I'd ... like to know where that \$1 million went."

Can the minister answer Kate's question? Where did that money go, Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to say that our ministry continues to be in some discussion with New Food Classics.

You may or may not know that New Food Classics replaced a firm that, prior to their arrival, had gone bankrupt. It's always a possibility that when we talk—when there are some difficulties and you continue the dialogue—that we may be able either to find a way to see New Food Classics continue or perhaps find a successor company to come in. So those are the kinds of conversations we're having.

I know the member opposite wants to help with economic development, and I appreciate her question. There are two other ways that she and her party opposite can help us. You can support our new healthy homes credit bill, and you can also support the creation of the southwest economic development fund.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, I often hear from constituents who are concerned about important issues affecting their work life, issues that are near and dear to them. The health and well-being of family members is one of the common concerns for many of the people in my riding. These constituents need to take time away from work to take care of their loved ones who are ill or injured.

Minister, what is your ministry doing to help those workers—who need to take time to take care of family members with illnesses—in juggling their work?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for the question. When somebody you love is sick or hurt, the last thing you're thinking about is work. We understand the need to be there for a loved one when they need our care and support. That's why we introduced legislation last week that would, if passed, give employees up to eight weeks

of unpaid, job-protected time away from work to provide care to support a sick or injured member of their family.

The new family caregiver leave would build on the existing family medical leave so that, whether a young child spends time in hospital or an elderly parent suffers a broken hip, family members would be granted extended time to care for and support their loved ones.

We want to give working Ontarians the one thing they need the most when it comes to caring for somebody who is seriously ill or injured: time—time to be with their loved ones.

Our proposed family caregiver leave is a matter of compassion, and it's the right thing to do for Ontario families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no—sorry.

Mr. Todd Smith: A point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you. Speaker, a point of order pursuant to standing order 23(h), which is the making of allegations against another member: The Premier, very early on in our proceedings here this morning, alleged that a request was made for a new racetrack in Belleville.

As the provincial representative for the city of Belleville, the question that I submitted to the ministry reads as follows: "Would the minister explain the cause for delay of the proposed racetrack and OLG slot machine facility planned for Belleville? It was six"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order. I didn't hear anything unparliamentary. Thank you.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order, Speaker: Earlier, I referred to the member from Kitchener. I should have said "the member from Kitchener–Waterloo." Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is a point of order, and to correct her own record is the normal procedure. Thank you.

There have been no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I would like to acknowledge Julia Frampton from the Chronic Pain Group who'll be joining us shortly. She's here with her mother today and others from that organization to help raise awareness of this important group.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to introduce a Chilean friend of mine, Jose Aylwin, who is here. He's a human rights lawyer with specialization in indigenous people and citizens' rights in Latin America. He acts as the co-

director of the Observatorio Ciudadano, Citizens' Watch, an NGO aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights in Chile. He also teaches indigenous peoples' rights at the school of law of the Universidad Austral de Chile. He's here to make stronger connections with Canadian friends working in the same field. I want to welcome him here to Toronto and Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We do welcome our guests. Thank you for your work.

RAIL ACCIDENT

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that up to three minutes be allocated to each party to speak to yesterday's tragic train accident in Burlington.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

The House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise in the House today to convey my sincerest condolences and those of the Premier and the entire government to the families and co-workers of the three Via Rail employees who lost their lives and those who were injured in the train derailment in Burlington yesterday. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Simmonds, Snarr and Robinson families and to their friends and colleagues.

I also want to thank our first responders for their dedication, bravery and professionalism shown at the scene of the accident: Firefighters from the Burlington Fire Department, Halton Regional Police officers and emergency medical services personnel, along with railway personnel, all showed their bravery and professionalism when it counts the most. Passengers were freed from the wreckage, the injured were triaged on-site, and those most in danger were airlifted to hospital or transported by ambulances.

This rescue effort was made possible by the many responders involved: air ambulance pilots and paramedics, officers from the Ontario Provincial Police, nurses and doctors from the nearby hospitals who treated the wounded, and Red Cross volunteers who comforted passengers by trackside.

The work of these first responders is absolutely vital in ensuring that our patients get the support and care they need right away.

Ontarians can be proud of their response during this difficult time. Everyone showed what we all know to be the true nature and spirit of Ontarians. When disaster strikes, as Ontarians we all pull together and help each other.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government of Ontario, on behalf of Premier McGuinty, I want to express my deepest sympathies to the families of those affected by this tragedy and also express a very deep thank you and expression of appreciation on behalf of the government for all those who worked so tirelessly to deal with the rescue effort. It was a tragedy which has hit

international proportions, but as Ontarians, I think we should very be proud of the effort that was put together to deal with this remarkably horrible situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Speaker, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the Ontario PC caucus, I would like to extend deepest sympathies to all Via passengers, staff and their families touched by yesterday's derailment of train 92.

We are very thankful for the skills and compassion of our first responders. They eased suffering on a terrible day.

Railways like the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railway built this country. They run so deeply in our identity as Canadians that it is impossible to imagine being Canadian without trains.

If they are the past, they are also the future. Train travel is increasingly seen as a sustainable form of transportation and a civilized way of getting from A to B. Train travel is becoming more popular with each passing year. Ridership grows as fuel prices climb and travellers consider alternate modes of transportion. For all that back and forth, trains are still a very safe mode of travel, safer on balance than travelling by car.

But as safe as trains are, they are not absolutely safe. At 3:28 p.m. Sunday afternoon, while en route from Niagara Falls to Toronto, Via train 92 left the tracks just east of Aldershot, in my riding of Burlington. We were immediately reminded that train travel still carries risk and that this is still a line of work where those who work on trains face real and serious danger every day.

Sadly, the three Via Rail engineers who were in the locomotive at the time of the accident lost their lives yesterday. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families in this trying time.

There was one locomotive and five cars on train 92; all of them derailed. The train was carrying 75 people when it left the tracks. There were numerous injuries to passengers and the two other Via crew members. Three passengers were airlifted to hospital with serious injuries; 42 other passengers and one crew member were taken by ambulance to local hospitals, hospitals such as Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, Hamilton General Hospital, St. Joe's hospital and Trillium Health Centre. Several of the injured have since been released.

We are never so thankful for the medical experts of the Golden Horseshoe than when tragedy strikes. Local police, fire department and emergency services responded quickly and with exceptional skill. The caring of victim services and Red Cross volunteers were also a key part of the exceptional community response to this disaster.

While at this point little is known about what happened in the Burlington derailment, we do know that it was a multi-track area used daily by GO Transit, CN Rail and Via Rail. Some reporters have noted that the Via Rail derailment site is near a crossover and within 100 metres of the site of a derailment four years ago this month. In

that derailment a freight train skidded off the lines, derailling 19 cars and tankers and creating chaos.

That said, the exact cause or causes of the train 92 accident is currently under investigation. Officials have already begun to investigate the accident in concert with local authorities and CN, the track owner, and in collaboration with the Transportation Safety Board of Canada in its enquiry.

We eagerly await their findings so that we can take measures to ensure that this kind of tragedy is not repeated. We continue to extend our wishes, prayers and deepest sympathies to all of those whose lives have been touched by yesterday's tragic, tragic event.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rise on behalf of the New Democratic caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to echo the comments that have been made just now and earlier today in the chamber. When the party leaders did their lead-off questions, everybody took the time to talk about this tragedy.

You know, you don't expect those kinds of things to happen in our country. You normally expect to see that in the paper, headlines about something somewhere else. We have become so accustomed to the safety records of our Via system and our airplane system that it's almost a complete shock because you don't expect it to happen. I know when I found out yesterday afternoon, my immediate reaction was, "Oh, it had to be somewhere else. It wasn't in Ontario." And I think that speaks to professionalism of the people who work in system and the people involved in making sure that we have a safe system.

That being said, an accident and a tragedy happened, and we need to make sure that the investigation uncovers what it is that happened. It was alluded to before that there was an accident in this particular area barely four years ago. So is there a connection with the equipment—not so much the equipment but the trackage—in that particular area? I'm sure that the Canadian Transportation Safety Board will look into those matters in order to determine what needs to be done so that this particular tragedy doesn't happen again.

1310

To those who went to work that morning and didn't get home: Unfortunately, in this province that happens. Everyone from miners to police officers to taxi drivers to you name it has a risk sometimes when they go to work. And nobody expects the morning that you go to work it's going to be your last day and you're not going to be coming back home. So our heart goes out to those families who have lost their loved ones as a result of doing what they love, and that is going to work. Who wouldn't want to be a train engineer? That's obviously a dream that we've always had as young 'uns, as they say.

To the passengers: You know, I heard stories told by some of the amazing co-operation, not only of our fire services, ambulance services and others, but how the people on the train themselves were actually the first

responders. It reminds us of the degree of our humanity: that people even in the face of danger are able to face that danger and not care so much about their own safety, but to try to make the situation better for others. So I think we need to say to those, our hats are off to you, because as fellow citizens, we hope that's what we would be able to do as well.

To those who were injured, luckily we do have a good health care system and we do have a good system of being able to move people from hospital to hospital and do what has to be done. Those first responders are professional; they train for these kinds of things. In fact, just last week in my own constituency in Timmins–James Bay the Canadian military was doing an exercise in order to train up our first responders if there would be an airplane accident in our vicinity. They simulated an airplane accident in Cochrane and another one in Hearst, and the whole idea was to train not only the military but more to challenge our first responders and our hospital system to be able to be ready for such a tragedy, should it happen. So when we see these types of exercises going on, we know now, when we see what happened yesterday, that there's a correlation between the two.

So our heart goes out to those who are the survivors, who are going to have to live with the tragedy of this. And we hope that we're going to be able together to move forward to find out what happened and to make sure that this type of tragedy never happens again. Merci.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the House leaders, to the members here who provided unanimous consent, to the members who gave their wonderful message, I'm grateful and I know the people of Ontario are grateful, particularly those involved. So on behalf of all of us, I submit to those individuals our deep-felt gratitude and thanks and our prayers. Thank you, all members.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I'd like to point out that today at lunch, over 80 school buses circled this Legislature in support of the Coulter Osborne report being released.

It's another McGuinty promise that has been broken by allowing a moratorium on the flawed RFP process to come to an end before the recommendations from the Coulter Osborne report are made public. The minister has had this report since January 26.

In my riding, the Thames Valley District School Board has motioned concerns about the legal issues with regard to the RFP due to the delay in the release of the report. It also has issues with the consortia's governance and issues with the RFP in general.

I stand here today to call upon the government to not break another promise. Give the school bus operators some clarity and release the Coulter Osborne report.

RIDING OF DAVENPORT

Mr. Jonah Schein: Davenport has a long and vibrant history and to this day it remains a terrific place to walk, to shop, to dine or drink espresso on a patio. Its merchants are proud of this history and they bring passion and commitment to their commercial endeavours. They lovingly care for their stores and their storefronts and they genuinely care about our community.

As I settle into my new role as the MPP for this great riding in Toronto's west end, I've had the good fortune to meet with numerous community groups and individuals who share my passion and my commitment for this community.

I've heard from hundreds of shop owners who are hurting, though. Toronto is very expensive and small businesses pay some of the highest commercial taxes in the GTA and small shops struggle to compete with the big box stores and the retail giants.

Too many storefronts in my riding now stand empty and each shop that closes makes it harder for its neighbour to stay alive. Too many merchants tell me that they don't know how much longer they can keep their doors open or their lights on.

I want to honour the rich history in our riding and the many small business owners who have had to close their doors and I want to recognize the small business owners who bravely carry on. BIAs like St. Clair Gardens and Fairbank are making huge contributions to our neighbourhoods. They're working hard to beautify our street-scapes, to organize street festivals and events, and they will ultimately help bring prosperity back to streets like St. Clair and Eglinton Avenue.

Davenport small businesses and BIAs are doing their part to bring back life to our communities, but they need the help of the provincial government, and we need the provincial government to reinvest in our cities and to support the small businesses that create jobs and make prosperous neighbourhoods.

ACTION ONTARIO

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Today I would like to bring recognition to Action Ontario and the several hard-working and dedicated members who are here with us today.

Action Ontario seeks to increase awareness about chronic pain and discuss the need for a comprehensive pain strategy in Ontario. Chronic pain is an escalating health problem affecting 20% to 30% of all Canadians. Types of chronic pain include neuropathic pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia, back pain and headaches. It has been estimated that chronic pain costs Ontario's health care system approximately \$2.1 billion per year in direct medical expenses and an additional \$13 billion in productivity costs from job losses and sick days.

Action Ontario is an innovative, non-profit organization that provides a voice for people living with all forms of chronic pain. Doctors, researchers, health care

professionals and patients are committed to increasing awareness and improving the diagnosis and care of people with all forms of chronic pain. I encourage all members of this House to meet with representatives from Action Ontario to hear about their initiatives.

I want to thank Dr. Angela Mailis-Gagnon, a constituent of mine in Oak Ridges–Markham and the chairperson of Action Ontario, as well as all the volunteers at Action Ontario for the work they are doing on behalf of Ontarians suffering from pain.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today we welcome the Ontario Independent School Bus Operators Association. They're here because the McGuinty government's RFP policy still threatens the livelihoods of school bus operators in Perth–Wellington and across Ontario. They are small business owners, they drive children to school, and they drive our local economy.

In good faith, they have negotiated contracts with school boards under a process that has worked. What doesn't work is the McGuinty government's RFP process. Their policy ignores independent operators' many years of cost-effective service, and it ignores what's most important: their long history of transporting children safely. That's what John Chapman and his company have done, and that's what Sandi Ahrens and her company have done. They employ local people. Their drivers know our communities. They know the children that they drive to school and back each day.

The RFP moratorium expired December 31, and now independent school bus operators are left in limbo. Twice I have written the Minister of Education on this issue. More than two months after sending my first letter, I have yet to see a response. The minister has run out of excuses. We call on her to stop hiding the task force recommendations from the public. We call on her to fix her failed policy.

BUTCH WINDSOR

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to commemorate the life of Butch Windsor. Late last fall, Butch died. He served our community wisely and well for many, many years, and many considered him to be one of the true heroes of Beaches–East York.

He succumbed to cancer, and it took many, many years for the cancer to win. He survived treatment after treatment, but unfortunately in the end that relentless disease got the better of him.

His funeral was attended by hundreds and hundreds of people, and a few weeks later the community held a memorial to commemorate him again, and again it was packed to overflowing in the community centre at Crescent Town.

Butch was a real fixture in our community. He was a man who was at every single community event. Last week, I went to a community event in Crescent Town,

International Mother Language Day, and looked around to see if he was there, because it was hard to believe you could go to such an event without seeing him.

He was renowned for his work with the Crescent Town tenants, and for his work on the Crescent Town Club and in the Flemington legal services, where he advocated on behalf of everyone—advocated on behalf of those who did not have enough money, but particularly advocated on behalf of new Canadians who had come to live in the area. We will miss him greatly.

1320

FAIR SHARE FOR PEEL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Recently, I was pleased to attend the important event organized by the Fair Share partner agencies in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. The purpose was to recognize a new investment by our government of \$3.6 million for mental health and addiction services in Peel region. The new funding is based on Peel region's share of Ontario's population, which is home to 11.5% of the children and youth in Ontario. The new funding allocation will reflect that reality.

This is great news for Peel region. I'm pleased to be part of a government that has addressed the concerns of Peel region and delivered this change in funding.

I congratulate the Peel Children's Centre, Nexus Youth Services, Rapport Youth and Family Services and Associated Youth Services of Peel for their continued hard work towards bringing a positive change in the lives of children and youth of Peel region.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Todd Smith: I rise today to get answers for my constituents. Hastings county and the Quinte area have been a battleground for independent school bus operators for the last couple of years as they struggle to ensure their businesses survive through a recession that feels like it has no end.

Two years ago, Rollie Montgomery of Montgomery bus lines confronted the Premier in Brighton and asked him if he planned to continue with a process that favours large, multinational bus companies over smaller, independent operators. The Premier told Rollie during that picnic that he didn't want to see small bus operators go out of business.

Today the Premier and his education minister are sitting on the Coulter Osborne report. These independent operators want answers now. They want to know if this Premier will have them picking up students or welfare cheques, as Rollie once said.

The Premier has never hesitated to protect his friends in public sector unions, but he has also never hesitated to ignore rural Ontario if it suited his purpose. Many of these small, independent school bus operators serve rural communities like mine in Stirling, Marmora, Bancroft and McArthur Mills. He may be Premier Dad in Toronto but he's a deadbeat dad in rural Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I suspect the member knows that that's not parliamentary, and I'll ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdrawn.

As the small business critic for the official opposition, I'm calling on the Premier and his education minister to release the Coulter Osborne report now and protect rural Ontario small businesses and private sector jobs.

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: Last week, the Ontario Legislature passed second reading of the long-awaited Ontario healthy homes renovation tax credit. This tax credit will assist seniors with some of the costs of home improvements to help them age comfortably in their homes. The annual \$1,500 credit will, if passed, enable older adults to offset some of the costs of such upgrades as a chair lift, where climbing the stairs is difficult, or of a walk-in shower or tub to prevent falls.

In addition to putting home renovation jobs at risk, the PC Party opposition imperils vulnerable seniors and those with disabilities. Why expose seniors to greater risk of overcrowding and longer and unnecessary waits for hospitals or long-term care when they can age where they want to be, which is at home?

One PC member even dismissed the benefit as "fluff." Speaker, there is no need for partisan politics or reflexive, right-wing ideology when it comes to helping seniors.

Ontarians everywhere, and especially older adults, are hoping that all members from all parties will put the interests of the people who elected them first and pass this important tax credit in the weeks to come.

CHILD SAFETY

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to speak about a case that was reported in the Toronto Sun on the weekend. It's a case that appears to be about a basic question of values and leadership: A young father and his family were shown a serious lack of respect and consideration by people in their community, people who are supposed to protect and support families.

A kindergarten student, a four-year-old, draws a picture of a man holding a gun. The teacher shows it to the principal, who calls Child and Family Services and the local police. The father of five arrives at the school to pick up his children and is immediately detained by the police, taken to the station, strip-searched and questioned. His children and wife undoubtedly terrified, the children are being questioned by social workers.

Let me be perfectly clear: I understand the need for vigilance around the issue of child safety, but wouldn't it have been better to start the process with a conversation about the picture? As a mother of five, my son would run around with his little friends at the tender age of four or

five with a banana—yes, a banana—pretending it was a gun. He'd shoot the banana at his little friends and they would crumble to the ground with dramatic flair, having been running around, and then start giggling after. They're kids; they have imaginations.

I'm surprised that, prior to taking the most extreme course of action available to them, not one of these agencies in government took a moment to talk with the father and children. I would like guarantees that this government will be taking steps to ensure that Ontario parents will be presumed innocent until proven guilty and not the other way around.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that the following schedule for committee meetings be established for the 40th Parliament:

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy may meet on Thursday mornings to 10:25 a.m. and Thursday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Social Policy may meet on Monday and Tuesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on General Government may meet on Monday and Wednesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs may meet on Thursday mornings to 10:25 a.m. and Thursday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Estimates may meet on Tuesday mornings to 10:25 a.m. and Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies may meet on Tuesday mornings to 10:25 a.m.

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly may meet on Wednesday afternoons to routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts may meet on Wednesday mornings to 10:25 a.m. and Wednesday afternoons to routine proceedings.

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills may meet on Wednesday mornings to 10:25 a.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion 18. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

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

"Whereas the Highland Companies, an American company, wants to build a quarry in Melancthon township which is to be bigger than Niagara Falls. It will be the second-largest in North America. It will be built over 200 feet (60 metres) below the water table of the headwaters that feed three major rivers. This will contaminate these rivers, which are a freshwater source for over one million people. Furthermore, the land that the quarry will be built on is some of the best farmland in Ontario. Over 50% of the GTA's potatoes are grown on this soil. The Highland Companies is under no obligation to fill in the quarry when they are finished. There is also no law stating that there must be an environmental assessment on the quarry site before it is built. This quarry will hurt the environment and affect many people, and therefore it must be stopped.

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

"To stop the development of the Melancthon quarry."

SCHOOL CLOSURE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I submit the petition today on behalf of members of the community of Woodslee, who are continually putting out more petitions and collecting signatures to the effect of this one. I'll read it.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board has begun a process to consider closing St. John the Evangelist school;

1330

"Whereas St. John the Evangelist school is vital to the future well-being of the Woodslee hamlet and its students; and

"Whereas schools are not just buildings for learning; they are the heart of the community;

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

"To take whatever steps are necessary, including boundary adjustments, to keep open and maintain the long-term viability of St. John the Evangelist school."

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it to you via Jason.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: "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, will affix my signature to it and give it to Samantha.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to restore medical labs in Tottenham, Stayner and Elmvalle and reduce lineups throughout Simcoe-Grey:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the consolidation of medical laboratories in rural areas is causing people to travel further and wait longer for services; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of the” McGuinty “government to ensure that Ontarians have equal access to all health care services; and

“Whereas rural Ontario continues to get shortchanged when it comes to health care: doctor shortages, smaller hospitals, less pharmaceutical services, lack of transportation and now medical laboratory services; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government continues to increase taxes to make up for misspent tax dollars, collecting \$15 billion over the last six years” from the health tax alone, “ultimately forcing Ontarians to pay more while receiving less;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop the erosion of public health care services” in rural Ontario and ensure timely “access to medical laboratories for all Ontarians.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition and I’ll sign it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of northeastern Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“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, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Ryan to bring it to the Clerk.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: “To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas the current enrolment of Avalon Public School” in Orléans “is 687 students;

“Whereas the student capacity of the school is 495 students, as determined by the Ministry of Education’s own occupancy formula;

“Whereas the issue of overcrowding and lack of space makes it impossible for Avalon Public School to offer full-day kindergarten until the overcrowding issue is addressed;

“Whereas Avalon Public School is located in a high-growth community;

“Whereas the enrolment at Avalon Public School is expected to continue rising at a rate of 10% to 15% a year for the foreseeable future;

“Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has made building a new school in Avalon a top capital priority;

“We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and Ministry of Education to provide the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board with the necessary funding to build an additional school in Avalon, to open no later than September 2014.”

I support this petition and put my signature thereon and will send it up with Darren.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Petition to Save Duntroon Central Public School and All Other Rural Schools in Clearview Township.

“Whereas Duntroon Central Public School is an important part of Clearview township and the surrounding area; and

“Whereas Duntroon Central Public School is widely recognized for its high educational standards and intimate learning experience; and

“Whereas the frameworks of rural schools are different from urban schools and therefore deserve to be governed by a separate rural school policy; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that, ‘Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we’re not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them’; and

“Whereas” Premier “McGuinty found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn’t found any money to” help “keep rural schools open in Simcoe-Grey;

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

“That Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Education support the citizens of Clearview township and suspend the Simcoe County District School Board ARC 2010:01 until the province develops a rural school policy that recognizes the value of schools in the rural communities of Ontario.”

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

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai une pétition qui nous vient de francophones à la grandeur de la province :

« Attendu que la mission du commissaire aux services en français est de veiller à ce que la population reçoive en français des services de qualité du gouvernement de l'Ontario et de surveiller l'application de la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que le commissaire a le mandat de mener des enquêtes indépendantes selon la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que contrairement au vérificateur général, à l'ombudsman, au commissaire à l'environnement et au commissaire à l'intégrité qui, eux, relèvent de l'Assemblée législative, le commissaire aux services en français relève de la ministre déléguée aux services en français; »

Ils demandent « à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de changer les pouvoirs du commissaire aux services en français afin qu'il relève directement de l'Assemblée législative. »

Je suis en accord avec cette pétition, monsieur le Président, et je vais demander à la page Mackenzie de l'amener à la table des greffiers. Merci.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have the pleasure today of presenting a petition on behalf of Tony Lewis, who lives at 529 Riverside Drive in Peterborough, right on the Otonabee River. The Otonabee River meanders through the middle of the city of Peterborough—very nice homes on the Otonabee River. They're great.

“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, Mr. Speaker, will affix my signature to it and give it to page William.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's from Zero Carbon 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 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.”

This is from Zero Carbon Ontario. I support the petition and send it forward with David.

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 150 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;

1340

“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 gather from the rumblings on the other side, Mr. Speaker, that the government is not very comfortable with this petition. Therefore, I am delighted to sign it.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition this afternoon from Dawn Ellis. She lives at 194 Braidwood Avenue in the south end of Peterborough. This street is about two blocks from where I grew up a few years ago.

“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” of America.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition and will give it to page Grace and will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE ACT (EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR LES AIDANTS NATURELS (MODIFICATION DES NORMES D'EMPLOI)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we last debated second reading of Bill 30, the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex had the floor.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I want to thank the Speaker and my colleagues for allowing me the time to continue my response to this very important issue in the Legislature, and the minister opposite for sharing the story of her own family's experiences with providing home care.

I'd also like to recognize the members opposite and their accommodation in allowing my colleague Jack MacLaren to share his wonderful maiden speech with us on Thursday past.

Mr. Speaker, that was an example of the kind of co-operation that I believe we need more of in this House. I'm not the only one who believes it. When I return to my riding in Chatham–Kent–Essex and speak with constituents in my office, at their places of business or on the street, I constantly hear the same refrain: “Get Ontario working again. Get us focused on what matters.”

For far too long, this government's focus has been elsewhere. While jobs have been lost, spending has run out of control and Ontario's debt has reached crisis proportions. I'm not given to using hyperbole, Mr. Speaker. When I say “crisis proportions,” the facts, while grim, bear me out. The Liberals' hand-picked adviser, Don Drummond, recently said that if action is not taken and taken immediately, Ontario will be staring a \$30-billion deficit in the very face in just a few years.

The Drummond report has demonstrated to all of us that the size, growth and scope of government have reached a tipping point in Ontario. Drummond reported in boxcar letters that efficiencies and productivity must be our singular priorities to wrestle with. These are sentiments that have been shared by this side of the House since well before the general election on October 6 that sent this government an important message: Get Ontario's fiscal house in order.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that this government will be able to accomplish that on their own. In fact, Ontario citizens do not believe that this government has the ability to deal with the crisis they've created on their own.

Our caucus has been the strongest voice yet for finding efficiencies and reining in government spending. We recognized early all the warning signs of being in a hole and the need to stop digging.

How does one do that? You get yourself out of a hole by recognizing what got you there in the first place. You get yourself out of a hole by mapping an exit strategy carefully and while facing reality. You get yourself out by not spending your time on efforts not wholly dedicated to your final goal. These are sentiments that we would have been happy to share with the ministry well prior to the Drummond report, had they provided the opportunity to engage all sides in the preparation of this legislation.

Instead, at a time when Ontarians are looking to this government to own up to their mistakes and, for once, get ahead of the curve in solving this financial crisis in which they have placed Ontario, they find themselves stuck in their usual position, behind and struggling to catch up.

The Family Caregiver Leave Act does not complement or satisfy the clear priorities set out by the Drummond report of finding efficiencies and focusing on tackling the size and scope of government. In fact, this bill may yet add to our economic challenges by meddling with the operations of our homegrown businesses and

saddling Ontarians with unneeded legislation that this ministry does not know how to pay for.

In short, we do not want this caregiver act to morph and evolve into a care-payer act because of a lack of proper consultation on the part of this government.

Lingering questions remain, Mr. Speaker, and, as I mentioned last week, my briefings with this ministry revealed an alarming lack of consultation in the development of the proposed legislation. A thorough investigation of the facts is required, yet the minister was unable to provide even basic case histories, facts and figures on the economic cost of this legislation, and, perhaps most perplexing of all, the need for this legislation, when, by the minister's own admission, similar laws already exist to protect Ontario families.

There are currently mechanisms in place under law that allow employees job-protected leave in the event of a pressing family concern. The minister herself admitted that. They are called, quite appropriately, family medical leave and personal emergency leave. Yet here we are, discussing the passage of more legislation, another measure that will allow the government to creep another inch further into the lives of Ontario families. And for what? Certainly not, to my knowledge, because of overwhelming public demand. This ministry has no evidence of that—none.

The reason is simple, I believe: political posturing and nothing more.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be very clear: This is not and should not become a debate about the compassion of one party over another. Political gamesmanship serves few, yet injures many. Each of us was elected to serve the families that sent us here. I believe there is more at stake here than good intentions. It is my firm belief that this legislation, if passed in its current form, will leave employers open to serious questions that have no answer.

Where are the safeguards to prevent unscrupulous employees from abusing this legislation and requesting consecutive leaves from work? As I said last week, we don't know and the ministry can't tell us. Who pays for the legislation if the federal government refuses to cover it under employment insurance? We don't know and the ministry can't tell us. And what is the definition of "severe injury or illness"? We don't know and the ministry can't tell us. A doctor may be able to tell us, had this ministry performed the proper range of consultations required for such a delicate issue.

1350

What of the workers who must work two jobs just to get by in this difficult climate? Will this legislation provide them with two concurrent unpaid leaves? Will employment insurance be enough to make up for it?

Perhaps most importantly, Mr. Speaker, a question that occurs to me as someone who has owned and operated a business myself: How does the ministry foresee this legislation affecting the relationship between employer and employee? Will this government meddling interfere with that mutual understanding, mutual respect

and mutual accommodation? A real threat, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you.

These are the questions that would be self-evident in a responsible, sober piece of legislation. These are the questions that we would not need to address in the House today, had the minister come to us in a spirit of co-operation. Yet the ministry shrugged its shoulders when these questions were raised before the legislation was even introduced, and there are still no answers.

Ontario families already have too many unanswered questions, Mr. Speaker. They're tired of it. They're now calling for solutions, not for this government to find the answer to a question that nobody asked. It is for these reasons that I strongly urge, suggest and recommend that this minister withdraw the bill from second reading until the proper investigations and consultations have been completed. I propose that the government work with the opposition parties to create a select committee that will properly investigate and collect the necessary evidence to support the introduction of this bill, based upon merit and clear benefit for Ontario families and workers, not political posturing under the guise of good intentions.

Each of us here endeavours to address and find solutions to the myriad challenges that arise in the lives of Ontario families and workers. Yet we have a responsibility, never more crucial than right now, as Ontario faces a crisis, a fiscal crisis resulting from rash and irresponsible spending, to carefully examine any piece of legislation that proposes more spending and larger government based on insubstantial evidence. Mr. Speaker, a haphazard approach to legislation serves nobody.

Now is the time for this government to finally do their homework. It's time for this ministry to realize that needs come before wants and that political posturing does not have a seat at the table when it comes to getting Ontario back on track after years of mismanagement by this government. It behooves us as legislators, in the absence of evidence, to do the responsible thing and stand with precaution.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to be here in the House this afternoon. I look at this bill as a minor but essential positive step to provide a measure of job protection to those taking time off from work to care for their family members that are very seriously ill. However, I really feel it would be more effective if there was some sort of EI or income support for the worker who has to take that time off to look after their family members who are seriously ill.

Unfortunately, I don't think this is likely to happen, and the most vulnerable workers who might be faced with this decision are people who are working in low-paying jobs with no benefits. So it's really disadvantaging those workers and saying to them, "I'm sorry, but if you can't afford to take the time off and financially support yourself to look after a member of your family, you're out of luck."

The other issue that also comes to mind is enforcement of this benefit that they're proposing. It's always an issue through the Employment Standards Act that things will be monitored and enforced. The biggest obstacle that employees might face is the dilemma of: "Should I take time off? Will I feel reprisals from my employer if I should do that?" And if they don't take that time off, that opportunity—looking after a family member in a serious illness—that has come at a bad time in their life has gone by the time enforcement through the ESA has maybe come into play.

It really needs to have more review and more information so that people who are in a vulnerable state to look after the serious family members when they're ill are considered.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's my pleasure to rise, with glass of water in hand, as the parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors and speak in reference to the family caregiver leave bill, Bill 30.

Family caregiver leave is a matter of compassion and the right thing to do for Ontario families. Our government believes that the last thing you should be worrying about when you're taking time off work to care for an ill family member is your job security. We will be encouraging the government to make this permanent legislation.

If passed, the bill would not—and I say "not"—come into force until July 1, 2012, giving employers the opportune time for transition.

I can tell you that on August 16, 2011, the government announced this proposal to create the family caregiver leave. The Premier has issued media releases on it: "Helping Caregivers Spend More Time with Sick Family Members." The Liberal Party platform document, "Forward. Together," also is committed to the creation of this new family caregiver leave legislation.

The Ministry of Labour is seeking approval to bring forward amendments to part of the Employment Standards Act, 2000, the ESA, to create family caregiver leave, a new unpaid, job-protected—the focus is on job-protected—leave of absence of up to eight weeks per calendar year for an employee whose family member has had a serious medical condition that requires care or support.

I can tell you that there is a gap in the current leaves of absence under the Employment Standards Act. This new legislation will rectify that and we should proceed forward on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: If you're watching at home and home happens to be Chatham-Kent-Essex, I'm congratulating your member and my new colleague for his first participation in significant debate on a bill under discussion for second reading here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I say that not only by way of congratulating my colleague, but also to bring attention to the fact that—I don't know what the number is, but it costs a small

fortune to run this palace. I bet you that for the number of days that we meet per year, we must be into \$1 million or \$2 million a day, somewhere in that vicinity. If that's the case, then we should be talking about significant and finished pieces of legislation.

There isn't anybody on this side of the House, there isn't anybody on any side of the House, who doesn't want to take care to provide compassion, to offer comfort and to be able to give whatever we can to someone who is under our care when they're sick and suffering. That's what this bill purports to be about. If this bill were taken in concert with other avenues or other approaches that we have in the province of Ontario, it might be something worth considering, but we have, at this point, two other programs already in place that tend to serve the same purpose. So why are we debating a third one that can be taken in concert with that?

The bottom line on this, as my colleague has pointed out, is that nobody has really come forward and asked for this. We don't sense any stakeholder interest in moving forward on this. There doesn't seem to be any groundswell that has resulted in this bill being brought forward by the Minister of Labour. So I am at a loss to explain why it is that we're even debating it.

I concur with my friend that a good avenue of approach might be to reconsider and withdraw this bill, flesh it out, look at it in concert with other programs and make the appropriate decision. Thank you, Speaker.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. We have time for one last question or comment, and I look to the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will add my two minutes on the Family Caregiver Leave Act.

Two parts of the act: The first is that it gives somebody eight weeks to look after somebody with a serious medical condition. The definition of "serious medical condition" makes it such that if you are really in the situation where a family member meets the serious medical conditions, chances are you are so stressed out that you couldn't do your work anyway.

I spent 25 years in health care before I came to this place. Not once in my 25 years of supervising a team of 84 people did I ever see an employer refuse leave, because if your child is in Sick Kids in pieces, you can't work, and your employer realizes this and gives you the leave. If he didn't give it to you, you could stand there all you want, and you wouldn't be able to concentrate or do anything because every cell in your body wants to be with that child that meets the "serious medical condition," and that goes for everybody else in our family.

What people really need is to be able to take care of that person. They need to not worry about where the money will come from to pay the rent, where the money will come from to pay all the expenses that are not covered by OHIP that they now have to assume for this seriously sick person. But none of that is in the bill.

There are a few people who will be helped by this bill, people in very precarious employment. But "precarious"

means you could lose your job at any time. If you don't lose it because your kid is at Sick Kids, you will lose it for another reason.

A very, very tiny bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll return to the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the members from London–Fanshawe, Nickel Belt, Ajax–Pickering and, of course, our esteemed member from Thornhill. Thank you for your kind remarks.

As mentioned earlier, I'm asking the Minister of Labour, who is seemingly addressing a compassion issue, of which we, as a caucus, are all extremely compassionate—the point is, I am strongly suggesting and recommending that the minister withdraw the bill from second reading until proper investigations and consultations have in fact been completed. Again, we're looking at creating a select committee that will properly investigate and collect the necessary evidence to support the introduction of this bill based upon merit and clear benefit for Ontario families and workers, not political posturing, as mentioned before, under the guise of good intentions. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the time.

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

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for the warm welcome.

It is indeed a pleasure to rise to speak today to the Family Caregiver Leave Act. It's important to understand the reasoning for the act, and I think I do. It comes from some personal experience in terms of dealing with a loved one, a family member who was involved in a catastrophic injury. So I think I'll lead off with that angle of why I believe this bill has some merit and why I believe we will be supporting it.

I may already have told this story in the House, but I'll tell it again for the sake of context. In 2005, actually prior to that, my brother and I started a fitness club together, Summit Health and Fitness, in Nelson, British Columbia. If any of you have been to Nelson, BC, you know how wonderful it is. We started that in the late 1990s. It was a small community gym. It was well regarded; it still is today.

In 2005, my brother Eddie, who would spend 12 hours in the gym, working and training people and running the business, would leave into the beauty of the Kootenay mountains to search out his exercise. Who wants to be stuck in a gym all day to get your workout? So he'd go. He would leave and he'd find a trail on his mountain bike. That day, he went by himself on one of the trails, the hundreds of thousands of kilometres of trails that there are in beautiful BC, and eventually hit a rut in the trail, fell off his bike, and suffered a spinal cord injury. Luckily, about an hour and a half later, someone came down that trail who had a cellphone and triggered the

emergency response mechanism that we all know is required when someone faces an injury like that. They got him off of the hill, and they flew him to VGH, Vancouver General Hospital. He spent six months there. He went to GF Strong Rehabilitation in Vancouver.

It changed our lives forever as a family. What happened was that, just moments after, literally hours after the incident, my parents—my mom, who had worked for 35 years at General Motors, and my dad, who was recently retired from the Windsor board of education—set into motion their plans to go and take care of their son, as any of us would. That involved, of course, taking care of the home, making sure that all their affairs were taken care of, finding accommodations in Vancouver and travelling there, as well. Luckily, Mr. Speaker, both my parents worked in a unionized environment—long-time employment. They had very good jobs. They had benefits and they had a retirement package, so at that point, they could afford to make this transition. They could go, and they did, and they spent nearly a year there as my brother recovered from his injury.

To this day, Mr. Speaker, he is doing incredibly well. He continues to train athletes, train individuals in his community as a personal trainer—as one of the best, I would argue, in the province of BC. He serves as an inspiration, to me and to everybody that meets him, really. He's an amazing guy.

But it speaks to the requirement. Did we ever think that we would need to do this? Of course, no one ever does. No one plans for an injury like that. No one plans for an accident. No one plans to get hurt. But what we should know is that if that happens, there will be something there to safeguard us, something there to help us. Isn't that essentially what our health care system is all about? It's something that we knew as New Democrats, as CCFers, in Saskatchewan, something that Tommy Douglas invented and brought to this country, something that we keep in high regard, and I think something that Canadians as a whole cherish. It's those principles that, should you become ill or injured, no one should benefit from that, but you should also not lose from that incident. Why would it be that, just because you got sick, you might lose your job, lose your house, lose access to the safeguards you had prior to the injury or to the illness?

I think that that's what this bill attempts to do. It does, I believe, identify a gap in our Employment Standards Act. However, there are so many that continue to exist, in terms of actual enforcement of the act. That's a big question that I have, Mr. Speaker, as a member. We have so many provisions under the act that do provide some safeguards, but yet the enforcement mechanisms are so few and far between. In fact, many have called on the McGuinty government to ensure that the \$10-million commitment made by the government under the 2009 poverty reduction strategy be maintained. Right now, we feel as though, and signals have come to this effect, that may be under threat, that \$6 million of that \$10 million may be pulled from enforcement. It's important to note: How would we add another measure to the Employment

Standards Act, yet remove more provisions for enforcement? It doesn't necessarily make sense.

So why introduce this bill? I guess, Mr. Speaker, I've taken the approach, in terms of listening to various bills and motions and everything that happens in this House, of listening through the lens of whether it's just, whether it's fair and whether it's equal.

1410

So is this bill just? I think, in fact, it is. It does provide protection of employees who need to leave to give care to their loved ones, and it protects them up to eight weeks. What happens after that? What triggers after that? In the case of my brother, it was a year, and there were many, many other things that needed to come into play to allow my parents to provide that care.

Is it equal? If you take into consideration what exists at the federal level through the act that is similar in respect to delivering care to family members who are progressively getting worse and could potentially pass away, that act provides some measure of financial assistance through the employment insurance program.

I went for a walk, Mr. Speaker, just across the park. It's a lovely day here today at Queen's Park. There were some arborists who were trimming the trees in the park. I asked one of them, "I've got a question for you. If one of your family members were ill or injured, would you be able to take eight weeks off unpaid to go and care for them?" And he said, "No; there's no question. I could not do it. I could not afford to do it without potentially having to tap into my RRSPs or any savings that I have."

So it begs the question: What is the general health of workers in this province? Do they have the ability to actually take an amount of time unpaid for any reason at all? I don't think so. I don't have a statistic, but it has been bantered around for quite some time that Ontarians and Canadians in general are only two paycheques away from financial collapse, from losing everything they have. That's what we call precarious work, precarious employment, where your job does not provide you with the ability to save for those rainy days or these unfortunate accidents or chronic illnesses.

I think that's where this bill falls tremendously short, in not only providing the mechanism or even showing a way—the bill says that we've got to talk with our federal partners and potentially trigger some mechanism through employment insurance to provide assistance. But it neglects the fact that the health of workers and the impact and enforcement of the Employment Standards Act is really in peril. It's actually at a crisis, and this government has really neglected to respond to some of those really important aspects, aside from being told by many stakeholders that we are in a crisis situation.

We can pretty much identify who may be taking a look at this or who may access this. For the most part, it will be family members who need to take care of their parents, who are potentially in transition from their private home, looking for home care, looking for long-term care, but, as in many cases, and certainly in Windsor and Essex county, they're unable to find those spaces. So

indeed, a family member will come into the scenario and provide that care, take them into their home, ensure that they have access to assistive devices, make sure they retrofit their homes, even for the short stay. I know that it happens in my community and I'm sure it happens in other communities that members represent.

Another area where this bill misses the mark, I believe—and I think actually the agenda of the government has missed the mark. If we had a substantial inventory, Mr. Speaker, of long-term-care facilities and beds in Ontario, potentially we wouldn't need an eight-week buffer for the largest segment that I believe will be accessing the tools within this act. In fact, in Windsor and Essex county we have an ongoing saga called the Grace hospital site. For four years it has been under development or proposed to be a long-term-care facility. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that deal went sideways very quickly, and the Grace site remains an eyesore for the members that of community, it creates a backlog in our health care system and, really, members of the community are up in arms about the lack of attention and the lack of action that the provincial government has paid to those folks in Windsor.

I'm kind of glad that this bill has come about because it shines a light on the inadequacies of the Employment Standards Act, where roughly 700,000 people in Ontario are employed on a temporary basis—part-time, precarious work, minimum wage, no benefits, minimal hours, and without safety and security of income. It is a large portion of our economic downfall here, where the middle class, and that erosion of the middle class, has been made up and continues each and every year to be made up of this segment of workers, the precarious workers. They find, really, the only way they can enter into jobs these days is through temp agencies, which of course have blossomed under federal and provincial Liberal and Conservative governments; they have gone from roughly 1,000 in the country to now nearly 5,000 temp agencies that are really the staple of employers' labour sources. It seems as though they're relying on these types of workers more and more instead of the types of jobs that I told you my parents had, the types that allowed them to be able to provide for the care of one of their loved ones.

I think something has to be done with these agencies, Mr. Speaker. I think that—we are ill-served by them. They do not advocate on behalf of workers. They set out solely to take advantage of workers, to give access to cheap labour—almost like a renewable source of cheap labour where, before a 90-day period, they are terminated. That happens all too much in my riding under the manufacturing sector, where companies will take in a big pool of precarious workers through temp agencies, let them work for 89 days and then release them back out into the wild to fend for themselves. That cannot continue, certainly not if we expect to grow our economy in any measure coming through this economic crisis and meltdown—a financial meltdown is what it is, Mr. Speaker.

Also, through the Employment Standards Act, we see companies that already take advantage. I think this is the

concern that the government side is raising—that companies will take advantage of workers. You present your case for leave; you say, “My son, my daughter, my mother, my father, my family member is ill. I need to leave to provide them care.” Without this act, Mr. Speaker, it could be that that company, without any regard, fires that employee while they’re on their leave. It makes sense in that light.

But back to the enforcement of the act, we have companies to this day that—

Interruption.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Are you okay? That’s all right. I trip up every time I walk into this place.

Mr. Speaker, I guess what I’m talking about is wage theft, and you know what? It happens in the millions of dollars each year.

I do have a figure. I believe over \$100 million each year is not paid out to employees. Either their hours of work are not adequately paid, or overtime hours. I wonder how long it would take if any one of the members in the House looked at their paycheque and saw that they were deducted a couple of hours off their cheque. It wouldn’t take too long for this House to be in uproar. Yet we don’t provide the mechanisms—certainly not enough of the mechanisms—for workers to find any compensation or to be able to actually recoup those dollars.

1420

What we do do, and what has happened, and what has changed under Bill C-68, I believe, was that we have now told workers that they are on their own when it comes to defending their rights under the Employment Standards Act, and that, in fact, if they intend on lodging a complaint to their employer, it’s incumbent upon them to first negotiate with the employer, to set their case, to present their case. Also, if they are requesting that the Ministry of Labour look into an incident of wage theft, they have to divulge a whole host of information, prior to the ministry actually triggering a response, really putting them in a vulnerable position and not advocating on their behalf at all but really leaving them out to sway in the wind.

I wonder if that’s the case today. If workers in this province are still frightened and still having their wages not paid out adequately and not feeling as though they have the proper safeguards within the ESA, then what gives us the comfort and the confidence that this act will be enforced to the letter of its law? I don’t know.

Those are questions that I look forward to having answered at the committee stage, questions that I believe are important to have answered for members of this Legislature and for those who will eventually seek to utilize this.

We are in a measure of economic insecurity and income insecurity. In my riding, Mr. Speaker, the issue is, and has been for nearly a decade, jobs and job creation, and not just the part-time, precarious work that I spoke about earlier but those good-paying jobs that we had and we were used to. We wonder where those went, and we wonder who was on watch as they left our province.

Those were jobs that provided for families, jobs that provided for communities, jobs that allowed people to donate their time—to donate their money, even. You only have to look at the donations to the United Way in communities like Windsor, where they’ve fallen by millions and millions of dollars. At one time, our community was known for giving the most per capita to the United Way, that offered so many valuable services, but now we are at an all-time low in terms of donations per capita.

So it is my hope that this allows a small measure of protection, and I know that it will, but the proper safeguards have to be there.

I just wonder about the intent. I heard some of the interjections from the opposition side, who say, “This is wrong-headed. We don’t need this. No one is talking about this.” I see the intent on the government side, which is saying, “We can do a little bit, but we can’t do everything.”

It’s funny that when it comes to what really makes common sense—when someone is ill, when one of your family members is ill, and needs help—New Democrats are saying, “Let’s help them. Let’s help them in a tangible way. Let’s provide them with financial assistance so they don’t lose their homes. Let’s ensure that they have the comfort and security to make sure that they can provide that care in a tangible way—actually be there and not be concerned about how they’re going to pay the bills.”

My colleague from Nickel Belt hit the nail on the head. Of course, there is no parent who would not do absolutely everything to provide the care for their loved ones, who ultimately could not work, would not be able to work, knowing that their loved one needed help. But there is the stress that that puts on someone, the added stress of knowing, “I have to do this. I may have protection under the family caregiver act, but it’s going to hurt, and I may lose more than I can give.”

So I urge the government to really come to the table and add the substantive pieces to this, add the components that you know will make this bill work effectively, find the measures to ensure that people feel financially secure that they can take up to eight weeks and know that they won’t be put into a precarious position in terms of their income.

I know that members have an important delegation to attend, and I look forward to it, as well. I won’t take up the entirety of my time.

I hope my story—and I know members of this House have similar stories, and if you don’t, I hope you never have to have those stories. I hope they will deeply consider the shortfalls that currently exist under the ESA, the shortfalls that have been pointed out for years and years, the nature of workers in this province, the fact that income growth is stagnant and has been even prior to the recession, the fact that no one should profit due to someone else’s illness and, also, no one should lose from a family member’s illness, and take those into consideration—is it just, is it fair, is it equal—and add the

components to this bill to make sure that it actually is a functional bill, that you get a good catchment from it, that people recognize, “Wow, something happened in the Ontario Legislature that, should I need it, is actually going to help.”

I think that’s the job we are tasked to do in this House. It’s the job I know that I’m prepared to do. If there is a will, there is a way. We all know that, and it will come down to political will. I think you can rest assured that New Democrats will support the intent but can offer some progressive suggestions on how this bill could be made a lot better—and it can be. It could be made very strong, something that other provinces could actually hold in high regard and could hold as an example that potentially they may want to do in other provinces. I would look forward to that, and I think that members have the opportunity to really make a difference here.

I think I’ve covered just a brief amount in my time. I know there’s a lot more work to do, but I will look forward to doing that at the committee stage, and I look forward to interjection from my colleagues in the House.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It’s a pleasure to join the debate and to pass comments on the comments that were just given. I took them, for the most part, to be very supportive comments, and I thank the member for that. I think this is an issue that all of us can agree that there are times in each of the lives of our constituents when they need the intervention of government or they need the powers that are granted to government to be exercised in a way that does something for them.

When somebody in their family is seriously ill or when somebody gets injured—it’s a quick, sudden thing, and those individuals need that time to be with their loved ones, need to know that they have to go and care for those people. They don’t want to be thinking “Perhaps I’m going to lose my job” or “Somehow my job is in jeopardy if I do the thing” that each and every one of us would put as our first priority, and that is, to go and care for people within our family who need us because of illness or because of injury.

It’s the right thing to do, simply, and I hope that it does receive the support of all parties as it moves forward. Obviously, it has to go through the committee process, and any improvements, adjustments or amendments can be considered at that time.

What it does, essentially, is that it says to the people of the province of Ontario, when something happens—and we hope it doesn’t happen to everybody, but we know the human condition will dictate that from time to time people do get ill and get injured. It’s not unusual for a family member to be a first responder in that regard or to be the person that the ill person looks to for their care on a daily basis. What this allows us to do, as individuals, is to move forward, give that care, and also to know that we’re protected by our government, that we aren’t going to lose our jobs as a result of that.

1430

I think the concept behind this is one that we can all get behind. I’d ask all members of the House to give their support. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you to the member from Essex for his comments.

Just a few comments on this proposed bill, coming from my research: I haven’t quite heard a huge public outcry of support for this bill. It’s more “You might need it, so let’s come up with this bill to replace it.” In fact, this is the sixth new leave-of-absence bill in the last seven years that’s been proposed.

A few problems I have with this bill: The first one is that “serious medical condition” hasn’t been defined. What exactly does that mean? Is asthma a serious medical condition? Is back pain, arthritis? Let’s get these definitions down pat before we release it out into the community.

The other part that I have problems with is that there’s no employee threshold. You’re talking about the big businesses out there, but I’m talking about the small family-owned and independent businesses out there, those with five employees or two employees. What are the thresholds out there? The personal emergency leave has a threshold of 50 employees, which is good. Smaller businesses don’t have the cross-training or the resources necessary to replace these employees who leave. We also have the family medical emergency leave that the person could technically use in the short term, if need be.

The other point I want to make, basically, to the medical leave, is that the federal government is supportive of that. If someone leaves, they’ll get up to six weeks of employment insurance coverage to cover their costs while they are looking after their loved one. All we have from this government is an intention to ask the federal government to please include this in their employment insurance coverage.

I think that’s putting the horse before the cart. If you’re going to really want to push out there and put a new leave of absence, let’s get everything in place. The main thing is to get the federal government on side, get the small businesses on side, and let’s define what’s actually needed in this bill.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I wanted to first thank the member from Essex and the member from Nickel Belt for raising the issue of precarious work; it used to be that precarious work was contract work, perhaps farm work, some retail work, but today, precarious work can mean anything.

Raising the issue of all of us being maybe two weeks away from bankruptcy or financial disaster—it used to be that the public sector, people like nurses, teachers, firefighters and police officers, had a job pretty much for the rest of their lives. They started in that profession and that’s where they ended. But now, those jobs are even

precarious and at risk. We have Rob Ford here in the city of Toronto threatening to reduce the number of police officers in the city, so those jobs are at risk. Every week, a hospital in this province is announcing the layoff of registered nurses to reduce their budgets. So their jobs are precarious and at risk. Now we have Mr. Don Drummond making his announcements about education, about laying off anybody who isn't directly involved in education and increasing class sizes, which will lay off teachers. So every job is now precarious.

The current legislation under the ESA for overtime, for vacation and for pregnancy leave isn't properly enforced currently. It's not done in a timely or effective way. So I think that there need to be safeguards in this legislation to ensure that it can be enforced.

I have one question about whether or not the weeks will be able to be used as days, as opposed to weeks, which would allow family members to share support, and it wouldn't impact their income as negatively. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: There are many things that the members in this House may debate and have varied opinions on, but I think that the need for compassion for our loved ones when they are facing a medical crisis is not one of them, and I can hear that from the members' comments this afternoon so far. That's because I think that everyone in this House, and those who may be watching these proceedings on the television, knows that when a loved one faces a serious illness or an injury, we need to be at their side and we want to be at their side. It's very important. That's when we find out how important—we are dependent on them—and they find out how important it is for them to count on us.

So this is what this legislation is meant to do: to ease those hard times. Everyone, I think, will have a personal story. I very much appreciated the one that the member for Essex has shared with us. I too had personal experience when my dad fell ill in Italy. I had to struggle. I had to go back numerous times. Every time we would get a phone call and hear that he may not make it over a few days, we travelled. Fortunately, he would get better. You would be there assisting for the care, trying to put it in place, always in very short time constraints. Fortunately, he would get better. We'd come back. A few months later, the phone call would come again. It was very hard to juggle that with family and with the employer, who was very understanding in my case, but it's not always so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Now we return to the member for Essex, who has two minutes to reply to questions and comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the members from Oakville, Elgin–Middlesex–London, Welland and York South–Weston for their comments.

I'll just leave us with this, Mr. Speaker: I spoke a little bit about precarious work and the nature of workers in Ontario today. The Workers' Action Centre published a report—Unpaid Wages, Unprotected Workers—exposing the reality of work where wages, overtime and vacation pay goes unpaid and people work at less than minimum wage. They surveyed 520 people in low-wage and precarious work.

Twenty-two per cent earned less than minimum wage. An additional 22% worked at minimum wage—that is, 10% below the poverty line—in 2011. Thirty-nine per cent of those that worked overtime failed to receive overtime pay; 36% of workers were fired or laid off without termination pay or notice; 34% had problems getting their vacation pay; and 33% of workers reported being owed wages from their employer. And 77% of these workers were unsuccessful in obtaining the wages owed to them.

It highlights the inadequacies of enforcement within our Employment Standards Act, Mr. Speaker. The threat, again, as mentioned in my earlier statement, is that the \$6 million that is proposed to be pulled from the anti-poverty strategy will affect the further enforcement of the Employment Standards Act, to the detriment of these types of workers: the ones that need the help the most.

If the intent of this bill is to help those who need it the most, then let's start by absolutely stopping the threat of pulling that funding, of pulling that envelope, because we know that it will only make things worse. There are ways that we can help. That's one of them, and finding some financial assistance for folks under this act will help as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for York South–Weston has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I'm very pleased to move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1440.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
L14	562	2	48-49	Ms. Cindy Forster: But they want to do public sector wage freezes.

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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Continued from back cover

Fair Share for Peel	
Mrs. Amrit Mangat	669
School transportation	
Mr. Todd Smith.....	669
Healthy homes renovation tax credit	
Mr. Bob Delaney.....	669
Child safety	
Mrs. Jane McKenna	669

MOTIONS

Committee sittings	
Hon. John Milloy	670
Motion agreed to	670

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Aggregate extraction	
Mr. Jim Wilson	670
School closure	
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	670
Kidney disease	
Mr. Jeff Leal.....	670
Health care funding	
Mr. Jim Wilson	671
Diagnostic services	
Mme France Gélinas	671
Education funding	
Mr. Phil McNeely	671
Rural schools	
Mr. Jim Wilson	671

Services en français	
Mme France Gélinas	672
Kidney disease	
Mr. Jeff Leal.....	672
Climate change	
Mr. Phil McNeely.....	672
Wind turbines	
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	672
Kidney disease	
Mr. Jeff Leal.....	673

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Family Caregiver Leave Act (Employment Standards Amendment), 2012, Bill 30, Mrs. Jeffrey / Loi de 2012 sur le congé familial pour les aidants naturels (modification des normes d'emploi), projet de loi 30, Mme Jeffrey	
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	673
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	674
Mr. Joe Dickson	675
Mr. Peter Shurman	675
Mme France Gélinas	675
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	676
Mr. Taras Natyshak	676
Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn	679
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	679
Ms. Cindy Forster.....	679
Mrs. Laura Albanese	680
Mr. Taras Natyshak	680
Second reading debate adjourned.....	680
Erratum	681

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 27 February 2012 / Lundi 27 février 2012

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Monte McNaughton	655
Mr. Michael Mantha	655
Hon. Margaret R. Best	655
Mr. Garfield Dunlop	655
Mr. Jonah Schein.....	655
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	655
Miss Monique Taylor.....	655
Mr. Rod Jackson	655
Mr. Michael Prue	655

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Taxation

Mr. Tim Hudak	655
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	655

Taxation

Mr. Tim Hudak	656
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	657

Air ambulance service

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	657
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	658
Hon. Deborah Matthews	658

Air ambulance service

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	658
Hon. Deborah Matthews	658

Air ambulance service

Mr. Frank Klees	659
Hon. Deborah Matthews	659

Air ambulance service

Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	659
Hon. Deborah Matthews	659

Supply management

Mr. Jeff Leal.....	660
Hon. Ted McMeekin.....	660

Air ambulance service

Mr. Frank Klees	660
Hon. Deborah Matthews	661

Nuclear power facilities

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	661
Hon. Christopher Bentley.....	661

Energy policies

Mr. Phil McNeely	661
Hon. Christopher Bentley.....	662

Air ambulance service

Mr. Peter Shurman	662
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	662

Waste reduction

Mr. Jonah Schein.....	663
Hon. James J. Bradley	663

Accessibility for the disabled

Mr. Michael Coteau.....	663
Hon. John Milloy	663

Home warranty program

Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	664
Hon. Margaret R. Best	664

Manufacturing jobs

Ms. Cindy Forster.....	664
Hon. Ted McMeekin	664

Family caregiver leave

Ms. Soo Wong.....	665
Hon. Linda Jeffrey	665

Correction of record

Hon. Deborah Matthews	665
-----------------------------	-----

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Ms. Tracy MacCharles	665
Mr. Rosario Marchese	665

Rail accident

Hon. John Milloy	666
Mrs. Jane McKenna.....	666
Mr. Gilles Bisson	667
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	667

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

School transportation

Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	667
---------------------	-----

Riding of Davenport

Mr. Jonah Schein.....	668
-----------------------	-----

Action Ontario

Ms. Helena Jaczek.....	668
------------------------	-----

School transportation

Mr. Randy Pettapiece	668
----------------------------	-----

Butch Windsor

Mr. Michael Prue	668
------------------------	-----

Continued on inside back cover