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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 4 September 2012

Mardi 4 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 4 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 4 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT (BOARD OF
INTERNAL ECONOMY), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMMISSION DE RÉGIE INTERNE)

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

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy / Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

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

Second reading agreed to.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT (BOARD OF
INTERNAL ECONOMY), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMMISSION DE RÉGIE INTERNE)

Mr. Milloy, on behalf of Mr. Gerretsen, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy / Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION
TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012
LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT
POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT
AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 28, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back, by the way; it's a pleasure to see you there.

It's also a pleasure and a privilege, always, to stand in this House and to speak about the business before us. Unfortunately, with this bill, there's not much before us. What is before us is a fairly modest, to put it succinctly—very modest—gift to seniors—if and only if they put money up front. They can spend up to \$10,000, of which they get 15% back. Now we in opposition have been talking about the difficulty most seniors in our jurisdictions have spending \$10,000 on improvements that will allow them to stay in their homes. The government side will come back at us and say, “But you don't have to spend all \$10,000; you can spend only a few hundred dollars,” but I mean, really, getting \$15 back in a tax receipt at the end of the year is hardly an incentive to widen one's hallways, put in a lift, do what's necessary for most seniors' homes.

Besides that, this is not the problem seniors face. I can tell you that if you were to poll seniors across this province, of whom one in 10 of the women live in poverty and one in 20 men live in poverty, making home improvements is not the first issue that they face. The first issue they face is paying their rent, paying their mortgage, paying their heating, paying their property taxes and, actually, human health. The two issues that see seniors go into long-term care the most are: (1) the cost of living at home; and (2) human health—their health. They need help, and often it's help with minor duties. It's help shopping. It's help mowing the lawn. It's help cleaning their eavestroughs. This bill does not address either of those issues.

This bill, I would suggest, will not keep one senior in their home that otherwise would move into long-term care. Perhaps some wealthy seniors—the snowbirds, those who go down to Florida—can take advantage of the \$10,000, make home improvements, see that value in their houses, if they ever decide to sell. But for most seniors who have modest incomes or most seniors who live in poverty, this bill will not help them at all.

Now if the government had wanted to do this right, they could have looked to our sister province in Quebec,

where they actually get a gift. They get some money up front where they can actually make improvements. They don't have to come up with the money themselves, money that is in very short supply for the vast majority of seniors in our province.

The second point that I want to make is this one, though, and that's the very question of the bill itself. We presumably were brought back from summer break to this chamber to debate and pass—although, of course, we in the New Democratic Party have some problems with passing it—a bill to basically send teachers back to the classrooms—not that they were ever not going to go back to the classrooms—the so-called Putting Students First bill, which in fact puts Liberal government first. We were brought back to debate that bill. So the question has to be: Why are we debating this bill, a bill that has been on the order paper for at least a year? Why are we looking at home renovation in these precious weeks before school started instead of the bill that we were brought back to debate?

Not only that, but then they brought in a new motion, a motion, really, just designed to stick a needle in the eye of the loyal opposition over here to our right, saying how wonderful all-day kindergarten is. Again, that was a bill that was passed years ago. So why would the government bring in a motion that gets debated, that chews up precious time in this chamber—time, by the way, that's paid for by the taxpayer, I must say—debating a motion that simply says how wonderful it is that we already passed a bill a few years ago? Why would you do that? Why would you do that when presumably the only reason we're all sitting here today is to pass Bill 115? So why would you do that? And why would you do this home renovation act? Why would you bring this forward? Again, an extremely modest bill, a bill that really pays lip service to seniors rather than doing actually anything for them—a lip service bill and a lip service motion chewing up precious debate time when, presumably, there's such an urgent task at hand, such an urgent task that we have to be brought back in August to debate Bill 115?

So the question is this: What's the real purpose behind bringing forward this bill at this time? I would warn that the real purpose of bringing forward this bill at this time are two by-elections, one that's happening in Vaughan and one that's happening in Kitchener–Waterloo, and it is to position the government so that they look like they're getting tough. Who are they getting tough with? They're getting tough with teachers. Well, you know, this is amusing for a so-called education government—but so that they can get tough and so they can play to their right side, so they can appeal to Conservative voters.

We in the New Democratic Party have always said that there are some great similarities between Liberals and Conservatives. This of course highlights those incredible similarities that really they're on the same page when it comes to education. That page is cutbacks to the classrooms, cutbacks to what our students have enjoyed in previous generations and, of course, trying to win by-elections, because there's nothing that one can say about

this government if you don't say that it's self-serving. It's certainly self-serving.

0910

So this serves the Liberals' purpose. Bringing forward this bill, Bill 2, doesn't serve seniors; it does serve Liberals—they think. Again, I would warrant that on Thursday we'll find out if the ploy has worked. But until that day, here we are chewing up debate time talking about a bill that is not the bill we were presumably brought back to discuss, a bill that really is a no-brainer, a bill that does very little but pay lip service to the needs—huge needs—of seniors, many of whom live in poverty.

To get back to seniors and this home renovation tax credit, Madam Speaker, again, you have to put the money up front. You don't have the money if you're a senior; the average senior in my riding, anyway. They don't have the money to put up front. But if you do, you get a very, very modest little break on your taxes at the end of the year. This would not keep one of my seniors—in fact, I have not had one inquiry in our constituency office about how to access this. I should say that I think I had one, and when they found out what the bill actually includes, that went out the window. They said, “We don't have money to put up front to do anything. We're too busy paying our hydro costs and our property taxes. That's where our money is going.” And by the way, they're struggling just to do that.

I said, when I was speaking about this bill before, that there's a whole new breed of seniors, a group of seniors who find it cheaper to get on a cruise ship and keep moving around the world than go into long-term care at the rate of thousands of dollars a month. That's how expensive long-term care is, and most seniors only get there by selling their house and spending the principal. We, the sandwich generation, know this full well, because we are in fact the ones who are stepping into the breach left by this government and looking after our seniors. If this bill is this Liberal government's answer to the plight of seniors, I would say, “Sorry, seniors. Wait. Wait another year or two until maybe something better comes along.”

But what this bill and the tabling of this bill really is, is again a ploy to appeal to people in a by-election, in fact to filibuster their own bill, Bill 115, which is what we were supposed to be brought back here to debate. We're not debating that; we're debating this. We're not debating Bill 115. No, no, no. We're debating a motion about how wonderful all-day kindergarten is, which was already passed years ago.

The question before the House really should be, what is the true motive of this government? I think it doesn't take a long stretch; in fact, the media has certainly cottoned on to the true ploy here, and that true ploy is two by-elections, Vaughan and Kitchener–Waterloo. That's why this government has brought us back. That's why we're sitting. It's not to pass any bill; it's not to deal with educational matters. No, no, no, no. It's just so the government can posture in front of voters.

What I'd say just to conclude, Madam Speaker, is that the voters in Kitchener–Waterloo and the voters in

Vaughan know better than that. They know better than that. They see through it. Nobody buys it. Nobody buys this; certainly not the seniors who call our constituency offices looking for help. Nobody gets anything about this Liberal government except the one true thing, and that is they want a majority government, and they want a majority government at any cost. Thank you.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. I appreciate the comments from the member from Parkdale–High Park. However—no surprise to anyone—I'm going to disagree about the intention of this bill and the fact of how important it is that we are debating this bill in this Legislature. I'm glad that the Legislature is back, because I like coming back to work and making sure that we continue to represent our communities, not only back in our ridings but also in the Legislature, and get to the important work that people have sent us to do. This is one of them.

In the last election, this issue was spoken of again and again, where seniors want to ensure that they continue to live in their homes, that they live with the independence and dignity that they so much deserve. They need tools. They need mechanisms and opportunities by which they can continue to live in their homes. The healthy homes renovation tax credit is one such tool among many to ensure that our seniors have the mechanisms to live in accessible homes—so that they can make changes to their homes.

I was just in my riding two weekends ago visiting neighbours door to door, and one senior, contrary to the member of Parkdale–High Park, spoke to me about this particular issue. That senior loves her home. She wants to continue to live in her home. She said, “Well, you talked about, during the last election, that there may be an opportunity for me to make changes to my home and get a tax credit for it. Where is it?” Well, I'm really happy to stand here today saying, we are debating this. We need to pass this legislation as quickly as possible so those seniors are able to make those changes to their homes, be it putting in ramps or elevators to their staircases or changing their bathrooms, making them more accessible so they can continue to live in their home. To the senior back in my riding of Ottawa Centre: We're working on it.

I am very excited and glad that this legislation is being debated, and I want to make sure that all members vote in support of this legislation so that we can pass this law and help our seniors at home.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks by the member from Parkdale–High Park. I think it's important to put in some sort of context. This bill has been dragged and delayed for almost a year now, and if they can really manage this properly—it was first introduced in November 2011—obviously they still haven't got the job done.

But if you look at it, the bill is quite measured in terms of what seniors are able to apply for and how they can apply. If you look in the explanatory note, you'll see “reference to qualifying expenditures paid by or on behalf of an individual in a taxation year for listed improvements to a qualifying principal residence of the individual.” So it's another example of a really crafty red tape bill. Seniors that want to get up to a maximum of \$10,000, they'll have to qualify for certain expenditures that aren't eligible.

Now, what I've heard from my constituents is that they're trying to replace their furnace with a more energy-efficient furnace because energy bills are the highest they've ever been in the history of Ontario, and that's what they face every month, opening up that energy or the electricity bill and finding a shock that they can't get away from—they have to heat their home or air condition their home. This is what seniors, I think, really want: a practical approach to avoid the high costs as a result of the HST. All the expenditures that they make should be eligible, and I think that this bill and the red tape attached to it doesn't really give them the tools to make their home more comfortable. I think that's a problem.

We'll have to see. The bill has been to the economic affairs committee and it's been reported back to the House—an amended version of it. The amended version really still doesn't address the amount of red tape that seniors are facing to stay in their own homes. So I put that on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for James Bay—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Timmins–James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Timmins–James Bay; sorry.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: People just call me Gilles; don't worry about it.

I just want to say that I agree with the synopsis that was put forward by my colleague from Parkdale–High Park who says that this in itself is not a bad thing. Is it something that we should be voting against? Absolutely not. It's a step forward. Is it a big step? No. It's a small step. And seniors are looking, quite frankly, for relief in a whole bunch of other areas such as high electricity prices, rents etc.—and drug costs, that's the other big one. My God, the amount of phone calls we get in our constituency offices where seniors have to decide between: “Should I take a prescription and fill it or should I pay my rent, my phone or my hydro?” There's unfortunately far too many of those.

The other point that I think needs to be made, and she touched on it, is that this government seems to be filibustering its own bill. We're now on, what, day five of third reading on a bill that has the support of the House? I know the Conservatives are going to vote against it because that's just the way they are; they don't believe in—they do what they do. But certainly, New Democrats are supporting it. I would imagine the Liberals must be

supporting it because they're the ones who authored the bill. Here they are. They've been filibustering this bill.

The member set out on Thursday, I guess, when this debate first came back after third reading—I had gone to the government House leader to say, "We're done. We don't need to speak to this anymore." But immediately, the Liberals got up. Well, jeez, if the Liberals are going to get up to speak, we're not going to sit down and just watch the show. We're going to intervene.

I'd be interested to see to what degree the government is really serious about trying to make this minority Parliament work. I think they want a narrative, and that narrative that they're trying to create is: If we can show that nothing works in this place, well, then we can make another argument for the by-election. Again, it's about Liberals taking care of themselves and not taking care of seniors in this case. But we'll see. Maybe we'll scare the government by not putting somebody up, and we'll see how this continues.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to speak on the healthy homes renovation tax credit. You know, Speaker, this is a bill that we tabled back in November 2011, one of the first bills that we tabled after the election, because we'd made a very clear commitment to provide this tax credit for seniors so that they could stay in their homes. It's something that absolutely I hear about in my constituency office. You know, we talked about this for hours and hours and hours at second reading, and we couldn't get agreement to have a vote on it. This is something that should have been done by about March break in a reasonable world. But hey, we came back and it hadn't been passed yet; it was still sitting on the order paper for third reading. We're doing third reading. It's on the order paper for third reading.

I want to comment about what the bill actually says. It says that effective October 1, 2011—and I do have seniors saying, "I've got my tax receipts. When can I submit them?" It would allow people to get a \$1,500 maximum tax credit, a 15% tax credit. So you don't have to spend \$10,000; it's whatever the reno cost. So if the reno to help a senior stay in their home is grab bars around the tub and around the bathroom, that's not going to cost \$10,000. But for that smaller change—it can make a huge difference to get the grab bars—that senior can keep their receipts and they can still get a tax credit. So I think we do need to get this rolled out so seniors can take advantage of it. I'm looking forward to being able to tell my constituents it's ready to go.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all who weighed in on this.

I have to say that I've never, ever met a senior—and this is going back into my ministry days, when I visited long-term-care facilities and retirement homes a lot—who said that they were forced out of their homes

because they couldn't afford grab bars around their tub. I've never met that. Those who can afford to spend \$10,000 don't need our help up front.

So this is a very, very modest little bill. Do we support it? Sure, why not? Why is it taking up House time? One would have to ask the government side that. As I said, I weighed in on that. I suggested, as did the member for Timmins–James Bay, that it's taking up House time so that they can filibuster their own bill, Bill 115, so they can take a stand, get some news in K-W and Vaughan and perhaps win a majority. It's all about winning a majority; that's why we're here. It's not about seniors and it's not about students.

The member from Ottawa Centre I have deep regard for, and I listened intently to his comments. I don't know why he's sitting with his back against the wall. I think he should be in cabinet. I think he should be down in one of the front rows, and we all agree on that in this House. President of the Liberal Party, a lot of talent—put him in the cabinet. It's sad that he sits where he sits.

Just to wrap up, does this bill accomplish much? No. Does it accomplish a tiny little bit? Yes. Do we support it? Sure, why not? Should we be doing something far, far greater and far more in depth to help seniors, many of whom live in poverty? Absolutely. Those are the seniors we're hearing from, and those seniors have deep needs that this government is certainly not addressing.

So, again, let's get on with it. We were brought back, I assume, for Bill 115, not for this bill or the motion on the bill that already passed. Let's get to it, government. Let's actually give the taxpayers their money's worth. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Go get 'em, Bob.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Rosario. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 2.

While some seniors will appreciate this option, the bill, in our opinion, only benefits a tiny segment of this population. Wealthier seniors will do renovations regardless. Poorer seniors will no more readily be able to pay that \$8,500 portion of the \$10,000 bill than they would have been before. This bill therefore only helps that very small group between rich and poor. They will be that subgroup benefiting from this bill. Additionally, [inaudible] further inside that group to address accessibility or functionality concerns.

Given the estimated cost, the government would have done far better to help all families and stimulate the economy by providing a pan-Ontario benefit such as, for example, the removal of the HST from electricity and/or heating fuel.

The government also has not provided any detail on how this program is funded, so we are only guessing as to whether this is increased or alternative spending. If we are facing a \$16-billion deficit and funds are so-called unspent allocations, this will add to the deficit. If the government really wanted to help seniors and has \$60

million in short-term money available, there are other ways to assist: for example, long-term-care beds and more home care for seniors.

This is only a window dressing bill for the Liberals which, along with the tuition reduction for post-secondary students, betrays a continued initiative to pick and choose small segments of society for political reasons.

Madam Speaker, this bill is one that is very important to all of us in all of our constituencies, where we have an ongoing aging population and many baby boomers approaching the age of senior status, myself included. The time it took for this government to finally table something that would try to help seniors is ridiculous. Even so, in committee, the government showed little to no co-operation with suggestions that were put forward by the Ontario PC Party. NDP amendments that we now see in this bill are uncosted but will surely balloon the total cost of this program to unaffordable levels.

When we PC members had asked for the cost of this program, the government was only able to answer in global terms and rhetoric. Never was the actual or projected total cost outlined in committee or outlined before this chamber.

Seniors will do renovations regardless of if this program is in place or not. Poorer seniors, those who really need help, will no sooner be able to pay the \$8,500 portion of the \$10,000 amount under this bill than they would have been before.

This government has not outlined where the money for this program will come from. I have asked before and I will ask again on behalf of my colleagues, is the McGuinty government doing what it should to help Ontarians get those good, well-paying jobs they need so that they can help their families? Is the McGuinty government acting fiscally responsible and helping to stimulate the economy? Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the answer to both those questions is no.

This bill says it aims to help seniors. It fails. This bill aims to help persons with disabilities. Again, it fails. This bill aims to stimulate the economy. Again, on the third count, it fails miserably. The only thing that makes this bill something positive is the spin that the government has placed on its title, the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: They're good at that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: They're very good at spin, as my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex says—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: —the member for Trinity–Spadina says as well.

If anything, this bill puts seniors at greater risk of losing their homes and their independence. In order to qualify for this credit, \$10,000 minimum must be spent on renovations. The average Ontario senior's income is somewhere between \$25,000 for an individual, Madam Speaker, or \$45,000 a couple. Most seniors living off their savings or dependent on their families for some financial support cannot afford to take part in this program because, as you know, we are facing at this time

some of the highest unemployment in recent history. Our numbers are over 7.5%, with no hope of that number dipping below 7% until at least 2015, if we're lucky.

Again, let me remind this House that we are staring directly in the face of a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt, according to Don Drummond, if we don't take action. We have over 600,000 men and women out of work, a serious jobs and spending crisis right here in this province of Ontario. There are billion-dollar scandals, which have been in the media lately, like Ornge, eHealth and many others.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Power plants.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Power plants, as the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex says.

This government is so desperate to change the channel to make Ontario voters forget about the poor leadership and mismanagement coming from this Liberal government here in Ontario, Toronto, that they are trying to do that with Bill 2—back to the bill, before I get pulled up by someone.

0930

There is no need for this province, once the shining light of Confederation, to be faced with this \$30-billion deficit. There's no reason that Ontario should be condemned to a continuing, stagnant economic growth regime.

On our side of the House, the path we're on simply isn't good enough. So I'll continue, along with my colleagues beside me and in the rest of the chamber, to promote our plan, the Ontario PC plan, to finally reduce the cost and size of government, to build and grow our economy with new jobs that will ensure that Ontario will lead again. This is our number one priority, and it is the primary issue that we must address. Until the debt and spending are under control and jobs are returned once again to Ontario, the PC caucus cannot support any additional spending without offsets.

We owe this, at the very least, to the people of Ontario. We owe this to Ontario businesses, both small and medium, and large employers across this province. We owe this to all of those who chose to make Ontario home, as well as those born and raised here. They've invested their lives in this great province and they know, like we do in the PC caucus, what Ontario is capable of being, capable of actually becoming great again.

In order to have the kind of social policy that we want and that the people of Ontario want, we have to make sure that we have the financial resources that are required to support our social services and provide the kind of government that Ontario families, including seniors, are asking for. This Liberal government is once again placing the cart before the horse, just as they always do—speaking of horses, it's not a good year to be a horse in Ontario.

Speaking about great governments of the past, I do proudly stand up with the PC government—the former government. Let's not forget that former governments by the PCs created over a million jobs in the province of Ontario; they created the environment for those million jobs to be created. Today, under this government, we're

faced with over 600,000 people unemployed. I'll tell you, the members on the opposite side of the House should sit up and take notice of what is actually going on in this province.

The people of Sarnia–Lambton have told me that they're not very interested in this bill. I've had no people call my office—as one of our colleagues here from the NDP bench said as well—no constituents of mine call and ask that this bill be expedited; they're not even calling to ask how to implement it. I get calls on the cost of energy, the cost of keeping seniors in their home, home care, health care, access to health care, issues with emergency room visits—there are lots of issues in this province.

How many Ontario men and women, let alone seniors, do you know who could put up half their annual income for a home renovation, as they live on less than \$25,000 for a single and up to \$40,000 for a couple? Not very many, I would think. The number of people this program would apply to drops significantly based on marital status. As if that weren't enough, seniors receiving ODSP benefits are excluded from qualifying for the tax credit. That would restrict people even further who would benefit.

Then, your renovations have to meet specific criteria—we haven't even gone there yet—which means that those who could afford to renovate their homes are an even smaller fraction of those who would get the actual refund. You see what is happening here: Slowly, more and more people are being excluded from each requirement—

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's all spin.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's like a Maytag washing machine—it's all spin.

Do you see what is happening? Slowly, more and more people are being excluded with each requirement. People who could afford the \$10,000 to renovate their home don't have to wait for a government cheque or a tax credit or some inspector to tell them that they qualify; they would do the renovation in any event. That's what you do when you've got the extra money. Meanwhile, those who need the help, who cannot afford the renovations and who don't have that cash to do what they need, are still left sitting in the dust.

This bill, at the end of the day, like most pieces of Liberal fluff legislation since I came to the House in 2007, is just nothing but a mean joke because it offers little hope and then proceeds to deny the majority of people the help that it promises to provide.

I believe that it is essential to manage your finances in a responsible way so that, in return, you can help others. This is no different than a government structure. If the government cannot manage their own finances and ensure that all their bank accounts are in order, then they can certainly not pursue additional spending such as this tax credit.

Madam Speaker, let me reiterate again: I know that time and time again as we talk about this, it's critical that all members, especially members on the government side

of the House, who may be blinded by their own talking points, remind themselves when they look in the mirror that their government is essentially bankrupting the province of Ontario. We have a jobs and debt crisis that need to be taken very seriously. We're talking about future generations of Ontarians who are going to be paying for the last nine years of total fiscal mismanagement.

Bill 2 is purely political. The bill is aimed at tugging at the hearts of the people of Ontario in the hopes of distracting Ontarians from the fiscal reality that this province is facing. This bill is meant to keep the government benches busy, keep the members from falling asleep in some cases—which is easy to do in this place. It really won't do anything to change the course we're on and the road that Premier McGuinty has led us on.

If you're a senior on ODSP, the benefits of Bill 2 are negated in part because of these other programs. Bill 2 states that you must obtain the age of 65 by the end of 2012. I'm a few years away from qualifying for that, but if I were and I wanted to do—thank God, I'm a few years away from that yet.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: You're 23 years away.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, a good 20 years yet.

But if I did want to qualify for that \$10,000 in renovations, I would be able to put \$1,500 in my pocket because I can afford the \$10,000. This bill does not help those who actually need assistance.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: No; that's all right. There are solutions to mitigate any abuse of this program or system—broad-based tax relief. The finance minister, since becoming finance minister, has increased spending by almost \$21 billion and has never balanced a single budget. This year's budget illustrated an additional \$2 billion in spending. Where is this money to pay for this program coming from? Where does the government think that they will get the money to pay for these proposed amendments by the NDP?

The Ontario PC Party simply cannot support a bill—and I can't—that has not been fully costed year over year, nor can we support a bill that mitigates an entire segment of the population. This is the same inaction that I have come to expect from this government.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're all about tax cuts, aren't you?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Certain tax cuts.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, only certain tax cuts.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. They've got to be targeted.

This band-aid solution is only covering up the larger wound to Ontario that Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government have inflicted. Ontario is sitting with a looming \$16-billion deficit and over \$400 billion in debt if something is not done. That's according to the government's own hand-picked study by Don Drummond.

To add insult to injury, this government introduces Bill 2, and today we're at third reading. It is hanging a carrot in front of Ontario seniors, hoping to lead them to the trough.

Seniors are one of the most vulnerable segments in our population. We cannot allow for a government to knowingly take advantage of them under the auspices of fiscal relief. This entire House knows that a tax credit as is presented with the healthy homes tax credit is nothing more than lip service. If you want to invest in Ontario seniors, then provide an incentive that will actually stimulate the economy, bring financial security to the seniors, and not do it on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

This Liberal government has argued that this legislation is all about protecting the economy and helping the trades as well. I would disagree with that. The bill is not really about seniors and it's not really about helping the trades; what it's really about is Liberal politics. We find it strange on this side, given the economic state of Ontario, that we are debating legislation that is in favour, at the end of the day, of more spending. It does not make any logical sense, but for some reason this government seems to think increasing spending is something that they should continue to do.

Of course, we've been on the record—and I have, many times, as have many of my colleagues—that overspending by this government is taking Ontario down the path of an eventually \$411-billion debt.

We should be debating a plan that would put those 600,000 men and women who are unemployed in this province back to work. This government should be introducing a plan to address that \$16-billion deficit and a plan to deal with this massive debt that we currently have in Ontario, and a plan to get our economy growing and back on its feet again. Yet here we are debating this bill that is completely ignoring the economic crisis that Ontario is facing.

0940

There's a good magazine that comes out every month called the Fraser Forum. They had a good article a couple of months ago called "Ontario's Budget 2012: A Missed Opportunity," in which they highlighted the opportunities that this government, led by Finance Minister Duncan, could have taken to alleviate some of the heartache and overspending in this province. "In March, Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan had one of those rare opportunities of which politicians can only dream. With his province heading towards a fiscal crisis caused by out-of-control spending and mounting debt, an opposition sympathetic to the need to deal with the problem, a public that expects his government to tackle the deficit ... and a media that" finally "understands the need for significant fiscal restraint, the stars were perfectly aligned" for Dwight Duncan.

"Call it his 'Paul Martin' opportunity. Unfortunately, unlike Martin ... Duncan didn't seize the opportunity."

It's proof of what we've been saying all along, since the days back in March when that budget was delivered: that the will of this government just isn't strong enough to deal with the fiscal crisis and the jobs crisis that we find ourselves in.

At this time, I will wind up my remarks this morning. I thank the House and you, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence and look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate my friend from Sarnia–Lambton. It was a very fiery speech and it got under the skin of many Liberals, I could tell. I agree with some of the comments that he made; I disagree with a lot within it as well.

But there's no point in talking about what he said, about things I might disagree with. I just want to talk, for the two minutes I've got, against this bill, because it's a picayune bill that will support some seniors, the one-percenters who have got a whole lot of money. But a whole lot of Liberals know that a lot of seniors in this society don't have a lot of money. In fact, we are in an unprecedented history where many of our seniors are poor and are being impoverished every year, each and every year. And rather than coming up with a program that actually supports seniors, we come up with this little program, the healthy homes renovation tax credit, and they say, "Oh, seniors I talk to are looking forward to getting 15% back of the \$1,000 they spend on renovations in their home." Please. Who's calling you? Tell me who is actually calling you, because I don't believe anybody's calling you—

Interjection: N-o-o-body.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The "n-o-o-body" fits very well—other than the one-percenters who call you saying, "Bring it on, because I need the 15% tax break." I don't think the people who earn \$15,000 a year from their Canada pension plan, assuming they have their full pension, and those who have the old age security, which is up to \$5,500—those people don't have money to spend in their homes. Most of those people don't own homes, in fact. They're tenants who are looking for affordable rental housing. That's what you're not getting.

Maybe I'll have 20 minutes to speak. We'll see.

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. I'm just thrilled to be speaking to this bill again this week. It's a new week, a new school year. I am thrilled; I'm absolutely thrilled.

This bill has been in the works for a long time—far too long. It's time to move this bill forward. It was last fall when the Premier announced that this bill, if passed, would be retroactive—retroactive, Speaker—to October 2011. Seniors have been saving up their receipts for some time now. There's momentum on this bill. We need to continue on it, and it absolutely will benefit many seniors, contrary to the negative criticism and cynicism from members opposite in both parties. It's a good-news bill that will benefit approximately 380,000 seniors. That's fantastic.

Our population's getting older; we're all getting older. We want to help seniors who want to stay in their home

for as long as possible. For those seniors who can't stay in their home, we'll continue to support long-term care, of course. But many seniors I know in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and elsewhere want to stay at home, and this bill will help them do that.

The other beauty of this bill is that for those who have a senior living in their home, they can claim this credit.

Seniors don't have to spend \$10,000 to receive a credit; that's a maximum. Many modifications to a home are much cheaper than that, and the seniors will be able to receive a tax credit. It's a wonderful bill that allows people to stay at home, and, more and more, people are looking at homes that are accessible for the future.

Is this our whole strategy about seniors? No. I spoke for 20 minutes, at length, last week about all of our strategies about aging and looking after seniors. It's part of a bigger puzzle. I think it would be a shame if the other parties didn't support us on this, and I look forward to voting—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Good morning, Speaker. Welcome, everyone. A special greeting to all of the MPPs who couldn't see their young children off to school today because we're working. I want to give a special mention to all those parents.

I want to commend the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his speech. You know, when you're here in the morning, you do a bit of Eastwooding, because there are a number of empty chairs; you don't get the full depth of audience when you speak here at the 9 o'clock rotation. But I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to provide a couple of minutes of comments on the record for my good friend the member for Sarnia–Lambton, Bob Bailey. I had the pleasure of sitting beside Mr. Bailey—we sat up in the penthouse just behind me when I first got here a couple of years ago. I know he's a very honourable member. He really cares about his community. He's an active member, and one thing that you can say about Bob Bailey is that he makes sure he talks to his constituents.

I know when he spoke this morning about the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, Bill 2, that he spoke from his heart, knowing that his constituents aren't well served with this. We've talked about this before. I spoke at second reading, spoke about a number of people in my riding. I know that over the third reading debate there has been some mention about grab bars and other things that people can spend—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Grappa?

Mr. Steve Clark: Grab bars, you know, on your shower.

We did a little research. To put in one of them, I think it costs \$50. So this actual bill would only give a tax credit back on a \$50 renovation of \$7.50. That's ridiculous. Right now in this province we're having seniors in their homes that can't even get a home visit for a bath, so this is ridiculous, what we're—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I agree with part of what the member says. There are other issues that would be far more useful for seniors, such as affording to be able to buy one's prescription drugs, for example, being able to pay one's hydro bill, other things like that. This is not a bad measure, and for that reason we're going to support it. It's a tax credit for those who can afford and who want to do renovations.

What I do take exception to, though, is the Conservative line, and it sounds good, like when they say, "We don't want to do anything unless it's costed out," right? But they're the guys proposing all kinds of tax cuts that, quite frankly, have created most of this problem.

There was an article that showed up in the paper last week sometime that said the amount of tax cuts that were provided by the Conservatives and the Liberals over the last number of years equals \$15 billion. Look at that. It just happens to be the size of our deficit.

The opposition in the Conservative caucus says, "The only way to prosperity is through austerity. The only way you can build a strong economy is through austerity."

Applause.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And listen to them: They're applauding. They're so excited they are falling off their chairs.

But there is another way, and that's what Andrea Horwath and New Democrats have been saying and will continue to say; that is, you grow your economy. You don't do it by austerity only. Yes, you have to be making sure that you balance the budget and that you're frugal in the way that you spend the money that you get from taxes, but you need to be able to grow an economy. You do that by doing things that assist the economy; for example, saying, "What are we going to do in order to assist employers to have the people that they need trained, skilled up, in order to take advantage of whatever opportunities exist there?" Only give tax cuts to those that are prepared to reinvest back in Ontario, such as the proposal that has been put forward.

I think that when I listen to Conservatives, I hear the Tea Party; I hear Mitt Romney all over again. It's the same old tired solutions that don't work and, quite frankly, will be rejected—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for York West.

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Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to add some comments on this particular bill in response to the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Even if I have one senior—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm very sorry; I must apologize. It's back to Mr. Bailey to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I didn't realize it was back to me already.

I'd like to thank the members from Trinity–Spadina, Pickering–Scarborough East, Leeds–Grenville—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you going to thank me?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes—Timmins—James Bay and York West; the member got a shortened, truncated, thanks there, but thank you anyway. I wanted to say the elephant bill was truncated but I better not get into that—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You and I should never talk about elephants.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they never forget. There's an elephant in the room.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity this morning. I think I made those points. I'm not going to go back over them again. Our concern was that this bill is limited to the number of seniors who would be able to take advantage of it. I could see that, like I say, at my constituency office, the people that present there are concerned about—it's either about accessibility to health care in their home or there are questions about their energy bills and skyrocketing energy prices, and they're concerned about paying those bills. I've had no one come—maybe this will change after today, after this debate. I'm sure there are a number of people back in Sarnia—Lambton riveted to the TV watching this debate. One of my colleagues said that it would be more exciting to watch one of those Michael Holmes homes renovation videos than watching this debate today on the healthy homes tax credit, but I'll leave that to others to decide—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mike likes this. He's in favour.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He likes this? I'll have to talk to him when I get a chance.

Anyway, like I say, we're concerned about this, and the PC caucus, at the end of the day, won't be supporting this. We're looking for real action for seniors and for all people in Ontario.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker; nice to see you this morning.

I look forward to the opportunity to talk about why we're really here. Certainly in my riding of Nipissing, I have, like the member from Sarnia—Lambton has suggested, not heard from one constituent about this so-called tax credit. What I'm really hearing about at home is the concern from seniors about their hydro bill.

Under this government, as of May 3 this year, we've officially seen our hydro bills double. Back when this government was first elected, hydro was 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour; today, that rate has gone to 8.8 cents—on May 3, in Toronto, Ontario, when they opened their hydro bills, they saw 8.8 cents a kilowatt hour from 4.3 cents. That's what seniors are concerned about today: How are they going to be able to pay that hydro bill?

It used to be your Visa bill—or your credit card bill—when it came in was the one you were afraid to open. But can you imagine that today it's your hydro bill that sits on the table unopened, because seniors are afraid to open it? Let me tell you that businesses are afraid to open their hydro bills as well. There's something I'm going to talk about this morning. I'm going to try to use some of the time to explain “global adjustment.” These are two words put together that are new to businesses' hydro bills, so

we're going to get into that a little bit later—why businesses today are afraid to open their hydro bills as well.

Now I visited a business in North Bay on Friday, toured the plant and then sat down with the owner and his son. I said, “Bring me your hydro bills. I want to have a look.” And they said, “You know, Vic, we're very concerned.” The reason I was there was to talk about high hydro rates. We opened their bills. They had a spreadsheet done of the last year, and it was astounding to see “global adjustment,” these two words that meant nothing to anybody two years ago. It wasn't even on your hydro bill a couple of years ago. It used to be called “provincial benefit.” What that meant was, it was a rebate every month on your hydro bill; it was money back to you. This government has gone through that and converted that provincial benefit—because it's no longer a benefit. They've now called it “global adjustment.” It's an adjustment, all right, but I can tell you it's an adjustment upwards.

So this one company—Central Welding is the name of the company in North Bay. We looked at their hydro bills, and I was able to point out why their bills have doubled in the last eight years. I showed them the line of “global adjustment.” The global adjustment—which is to pay for the Green Energy Act, conservation and a few other things—now is higher than their electricity consumption, but there's no rhyme or reason to global adjustment.

I have been an elected member for 11 months, and I'm lucky to be in the position as Ontario's energy critic, so I have spent a tremendous amount of time looking into this energy sector. There aren't five people who will agree on how global adjustment is developed. Nonetheless, there would be universally no one who can agree that it's something that we're happy with. It is about to bankrupt the business community of Ontario. There's just no question. I'm going to give you some examples as we talk.

But here I am at Central Welding, and I'm looking at what their hydro bill was. Their hydro bill is at one level; their global adjustment is considerably higher, sometimes two times higher. In other months, their hydro may have been lower, but their global adjustment is even higher. It makes no rhyme and no reason whatsoever.

Speaker, let's look at how all this began: with the introduction in 2009 of the Green Energy Act. It may have a noble name—“Green Energy Act”—but let me tell you, there is absolutely nothing further from being accurate and nothing green about the Green Energy Act. In fact, I will tell you, as in my examples, that what has happened is wind power has merely replaced water power in Ontario—one green for another green. Wind power today accounts for 3% of the energy we use in Ontario or that we create in Ontario. Water power has dropped from 25% of our power source to 22%. We've added 3%; we've taken 3%.

We've swapped one green for another, which happened to have been the green energy water power that Ontario was built on. Over 100 years, those water turbines have been spinning out clean, green, affordable, re-

newable energy to Ontario. We've taken some of that away and added unbelievably expensive wind turbine power, and are bankrupting Ontario to boot. One green up, one green down; tell me, Speaker, what can be green about that?

So again, we look back to 2009. I know I sat in the mayor's chair in the city of North Bay at the time, opened the package from the clerk, and it was this Green Energy Act. I started to read about it. It had an admirable name, I must admit. It had a very admirable name. There were some very appealing rates that no mayor could resist, obviously. Here we are with this plan to force so-called green energy in Ontario, and it's done in a couple of ways—three or four things that they did. Number one, they began by paying one of the highest subsidies for wind and solar in the world—not just in the country, not just North America, but in the world—which was designed to help attract many people here for this rich subsidy. Number two, they guaranteed that they would buy power from you whenever it could be made.

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Sadly, had they done any research in advance—as the Auditor General told us last November, there was no business plan put together for this, no knowledge of it, no plan to tell you what the ill effects will be: the ill effects on health, the ill effects on the economy, the ill effects to the business community, the ill effects to families who are budgeting, the ill effects to the seniors who can no longer afford to pay their hydro bill. None of that was gamed out. The Auditor General told us that. In fact, sadly, the Liberals' own cabinet was not aware of the Green Energy Act until it was designed and developed and implemented. The Auditor General has told us that, and I have every faith in the Auditor General's announcement.

In fact, I'm really quite looking forward to the Auditor General's report this coming November, because he has been incredibly critical of the Green Energy Act, and rightly so. Nothing has improved in the last year; only more damning evidence has come. So we look forward to that Auditor General's—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I'm just trying to understand about the renovation tax credit, and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I would just ask the member to make sure that his comments are indeed in keeping with Bill 2.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. As I mentioned only a few seconds ago, had they been listening, I talked about the fact that this is the number one issue with seniors. This is the issue, not this red herring that the Liberal Party has proffered to us over this election period in Kitchener, meant to distract us from talking about the number one issue with seniors. It truly is the number one issue with seniors.

The tax credit, which would be only for a few and only if they provide the \$10,000 up front to get a few dollars as a tax credit—this is not what is important to seniors. What is important in all of the town halls I've

been to—and I've been to a tremendous number of them this summer, as you know. The schedule in this energy critic role has been very gruelling, meeting with seniors over and over and over. All they want to talk about is high energy prices. They can't focus on anything else. They can't afford—they're afraid to open their hydro bills, Speaker.

Let me just continue talking about why we got into that and how it affects the seniors, which, sadly, has left them no options to utilize this program, or any other program, for that matter, when they don't have any other money in their pockets.

Here we've got, as I mentioned, a program that is the richest in the world, a program that guarantees to buy so-called green energy whenever and wherever it is made, regardless, obviously, of whether there's transmission capacity. We're now learning the tales of that in the microFIT program that's being allowed to be repurchased back by OPA. We now understand as well the math behind the trouble with the Green Energy Act. By overpaying on these rich programs—we have found that wind generally is made at night. The problem with wind when it's made at night is we don't need the wind when it's made at night. Predominantly, our use of wind is during the day. So we allow this wind power that's made at night to be captured. We pay for it—we richly pay for it. We find ourselves with a huge surplus of energy almost every night. During the day, we have a capacity to make 1,700 megawatts of wind power, but if you look at the IESO's report last week, the week before, there were days when we made nine megawatts of power at noon from wind. We pay for 1,700 megawatts of wind. We have that capacity, yet we're generating nine megawatts of wind. We've paid billions of dollars—billions of dollars—in this so-called Green Energy Act to make nine megawatts of wind. It's no wonder seniors can't afford to pay for their bills. We're paying all that money out for such little end-of-use capacity. At night, when the wind blows, we make more power. We don't need it. We end up paying the States, paying Quebec, to take that power from us.

Now, here's where the problem for our seniors comes from—let me get to the root of why the seniors are afraid to open their hydro bills: We are paying the States and we are paying Quebec to take our surplus power, power we didn't need to have made. We have it made by wind. We pay Quebec. We pay the States. The Auditor General, again, in his report last November, told us in the first 10 months of last year, we paid \$420 million to the States and to Quebec to take that power. That money has to come from somewhere, so that ends up in your global adjustment. Put that “one” in the column, which has now ended up on seniors' bills, families' bills and businesses' bills. It's not identified on the senior's bill, but it is on the business bill; it's broken out. There's a line there that says “global adjustment;” on your family bill and your senior's bill that they're afraid to open, it's all built in together. They don't differentiate it.

We continue to make this power that we don't need, and as a result, we allow water power to flow over Niag-

ara Falls, and we don't capture it. We allow the generators to stay idle, those generators we paid for 100 years ago. In fact, there were many of us that toured DeCew number 1—and it's called number 1—

Mr. Todd Smith: I was there.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The member from Prince Edward–Hastings was with us that day. We toured DeCew number 1: the first water power plant made in Ontario. In fact, we both saw the generator that is there, still operating—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Point of order, Madam Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I don't know what hydro generators have to do with the healthy homes tax credit. Perhaps we could hear some debate on the bill that's on the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to return to the healthy homes tax credit.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'll continue talking about how seniors cannot afford this red herring, so-called healthy homes tax credit, Speaker. They are broke. They're struggling to pay their hydro bills month after month. They're afraid to open their hydro bill this month, because under this government we've seen hydro rates rise from 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour to 8.8 cents.

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: And I realize the truth hurts, but I would look forward to the opportunity to continue to talk about what really is affecting seniors and why they are having no take-up on this opportunity that they're presenting, because they cannot afford to get into that.

When the member from Prince Edward–Hastings and I toured DeCew number 1—it was built in 1898; it's still operating. My point is that it's paid for. It has long been paid for. In fact, the generator was hand-wound by Nikola Tesla himself and it still is operating today. That is how we used to have clean, green, affordable, reliable, renewable energy—

Mr. Todd Smith: Now we're wasting it.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —and now we're wasting billions of dollars on wind turbines that are costing us billions, when the federal government has said there are health issues. We're asking for a moratorium on that.

We've learned that water that we spill over Niagara Falls cost us \$300 million in lost resources last year alone. Add that to the global adjustment ticket. Somebody has got to pay for that waste. And then when we really make more power than we need, we abruptly shut down our nuclear plants. Now, Speaker, we did that four times last July. They are not designed to be shut down like that. This is how money adds up that costs our seniors and our families. It comes on their bills, because for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. It was not thought out when that bill was passed, and so you have abruptly shut down nuclear plants. When those are shut down—they're like a rocket launch sequence—they take days to ramp back up again. In the meantime, to

replace that, we have to fire up gas plants to replace that power while the nuclear group is reorganizing to re-launch that. So, Speaker, we're spilling water, venting steam and draining jobs. That's what this has come to in the province of Ontario.

Up in Timmins, Speaker, Xstrata Copper—this will be the final wrap-up of why this makes no sense and how it has hurt our seniors and people who used to work in Ontario. We pay Quebec to take that surplus power. Quebec then knocks at the door of Xstrata Copper in Timmins and says, "Look, we've got all this cheap power that we were paid for to take from you guys. We have all this cheap power. Why don't you leave Ontario, move over, just over the border into Quebec and reopen," and Xstrata Copper, tempted by half-price energy, said yes. Speaker, they dropped 670 employees in Timmins, a community of 45,000 men and women—670 are gone. They've now moved into the province of Quebec and reopened work at the smelter there for cheap energy. This is what's causing the draining of jobs in Ontario. This is why your seniors cannot afford to pay their hydro bill.

This government has mismanaged the economy. Today we have 600,000 unemployed in Ontario, 300,000 fewer people working in the manufacturing sector, just what the Auditor General told us. For every job created in the so-called green energy sector, we lose two to four jobs in other manufacturing sectors. If Xstrata Copper in Timmins isn't the poster child for that expression from the Auditor General, I don't know what better example there is: 670 are lost for cheap power just across the border, we have seniors who can't open their bill, and here we are, called back to talk about something to distract us from the election in Kitchener, when we should be talking about energy and why seniors cannot afford to pay their energy bills today, never mind having any money to look at this home tax credit. They don't have the \$10,000 to put into it. They don't have the money to pay their hydro bill every month.

So, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to open up the discussion on what seniors really want to talk about.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. Welcome back. Great to see you in the chair.

It is my privilege to introduce some students from the University of Waterloo co-op program, here in the members' gallery to my right: Renée Sambrook and Matt Botelho. If you guys could stand up. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your first assignment.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, with a lot of sound and fury, you announced that we'd have an emergency session of the Legislature. It came in like some kind of legislative lion but quickly transformed into a lame duck session. You had a partial wage freeze, one of 4,000. It was like a wage freeze on training wheels, but no true action.

Premier, if we really want to get at the root of the problem, to actually reduce the size and cost of government, why don't we use this additional session, instead of spinning our wheels, to do the right thing and bring in an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us—doctors, teachers, MPPs, OPSEU workers? It's fair; it's reasonable; it will save us \$2 billion a year. Let's just get on with it. Take some action, Premier, and bring in a wage freeze for all of us.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question by my honourable colleague, and I understand the position he's putting forward. I say again I can't agree with him.

I appreciate the support they're providing with respect to our Putting Students First legislation. I think it's doing exactly what we need to do. It's going to address the automatic pay hike that otherwise would have occurred, it's going to hit the pause button on teacher pay, and it's going to ensure that we have stability in our schools, which is exactly what families want.

But with respect to the other request being made by my honourable colleague on an ongoing basis, we can't do that, because it would be subject to attacks in the courts, which I think would be justifiable. There is an element of process here that we have to respect. We're doing that with this particular legislation that is before the House at present, and we'll find a way to do it with respect to other public sector employees going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The unfortunate reality is that there has been a transparent phoniness to this legislative session. It was supposed to be a time to actually get serious about the debt crisis, and we saw maybe baby steps. With due apologies to Winston Churchill, never have so many come running from so far, so fast, for so little.

Let me try one more, Premier, and that's the end of these bankable sick days in the province, a benefit that has no grounding in the reality of families who are struggling to pay the bills. Isn't it time to end this practice where, for example, firefighters can cash in sick days they've not used, to the tune of \$50,000, like poker chips at a casino? Premier, if you want to be serious about the fiscal situation, why don't you end this practice across the board for all of us in the broader public sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are addressing it through our Putting Students First legislation. We think, as an employer, it is a practice that we can no longer afford. It is something that was already stopped with respect to the

Ontario Provincial Police. Insofar as municipal employees are concerned, I'll leave that to municipal employers to use their own judgment and make their own call in that regard. My honourable colleague may want to reach into municipalities and introduce some of his thinking there, but I think that would be unfortunate. I have faith in the abiding wisdom of our duly elected municipal representatives. We will deal with our employees, and I'll let others deal with their employees.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I don't know if the Premier's arguments are simply superficial or just slippery. On one hand, the Premier says that it's constitutional to do a wage freeze for teachers, but he says it's not constitutional to do it for anybody else. The Premier now is arguing that he would end bankable sick days for teachers, but he won't end bankable sick days for others, like firefighters.

Premier, you know this full well. You actually reached into school boards; through legislation and subsequent regulation, you're going to end that in school boards. So you did move into the school board arena. Municipalities have the exact same relationship with the province as do school boards, so I don't understand your reasoning, Premier. Why is it good for teachers but not good for firefighters? Ours is fair and reasonable: Eliminate bankable sick days across the board and save taxpayers money.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, that's characteristic of the approach that was brought by my honourable colleague when he sat in cabinet during the PC government years. They downloaded new responsibilities on to municipalities, responsibilities that our municipalities could not afford. We've been working for the last nine years to take back those responsibilities, where they properly belong, and to accord a modicum of respect to our municipal partners.

I understand that's their particular approach. They have all the answers to all the world's greatest problems, Speaker. We don't pretend to do that, but we understand something: that we are at our best when we work together and particularly when we respect our municipal partners.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, Speaker: I do regret the transparent phoniness of the Premier's message. A man who for nine years opened the floodgates to spending is now saying he's going to turn off the spigot. Nobody believes it, Speaker. With a wink and a nod, he's going to increase spending if it's a majority government. We all know that. People see through it, and increased taxes would pay for it.

Let me try a different tack, since the Premier shoots down any of the ideas we bring forward to rein in spending on a reasonable basis. Premier, you brought forward, in your budget bill in 2010, a massive loophole

to allow bureaucrats to get bonus pay increases. We saw as a result that 98% of senior bureaucrats got merit pay increases, some up to 14%—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: What the Premier has not answered, despite the fact I've asked this question multiple times—Premier, please tell me again, why did you specifically put that loophole in your budget bill in 2010?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as we indicated, we are going to change the policy that was established by the Harris government, the government that he was part of. The total amount available to employees in the public sector with respect to this pay-for-performance is actually where it was in 2003. But we do concur that it's important that all people in the public and broader public sector share in this. We'll be bringing forward appropriate changes to deal with that. I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues found out about this after it was reported in the papers. We're working hard at it. We'll get it right, and we will have a complete freeze.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I still have not heard the rationale from the Premier as to why they created that loophole. We did point it out back in 2010. We said there was no justification for it. They maintained that loophole, and we saw the result, cause and effect—a 98% increase to senior bureaucrats. It's like they got their hand caught in the cookie jar and now they're trying to blame the cookie. We know who was behind that from the beginning, Speaker.

If you can't justify why you created it, maybe you can justify why you're not going to close it. I can't figure out your logic. It was the wrong thing to do. We objected at the time; we object now. We're clear; we're consistent. Will you do the right thing? End these merit pay increases as part of an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us. It will save us \$2 billion a year.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, during the budget process, we asked for their views on these matters. Did they respond? No. They rang the bells, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: They walked away.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They walked away, absent without leadership.

Mr. Speaker, we are implementing a full wage freeze across the public and broader public sectors that will, in effect, cover pay-for-performance as well for non-bargained employees. We want to make sure we get this right. I'll be bringing forward the appropriate changes over the course of the next number of weeks, and that will result in a freeze on pay-for-performance.

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

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, the Premier's finance minister reminds me of that character in Casablanca who found himself suddenly caught in the casino

and wondered where all the gambling was taking place. It's like they walked into their office right after election day and said, "Holy smokes. Who spent all this money?" Nine years of runaway spending, and they want to go back on that path. We can't afford it.

If you're actually serious about this session, if you actually want to roll up your sleeves and get down to work, we've laid out idea after idea: an across-the-board wage freeze, ending the bankable sick days, closing the McGuinty loophole for senior bureaucrats, and an economic statement this fall that actually reduces spending, will reduce the size and cost of government. If you don't like all four, pick one, pick two, but, please, do something and use the session to get serious about our budget deficit.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period, the Leader of the Opposition quoted Winston Churchill. It reminded me of something Mr. Churchill said in the British House of Commons to the Leader of the Opposition. He said, "The member opposite is a modest man, and he has much to be modest about, Mr. Speaker"—no plan. They want to cut taxes. They want to cut education. This government's about protecting full-day learning. It's about smaller class sizes. It's a real plan that's working.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to take a course of action that will result in the ultimate failure of the policy. We won't do that. We are going to do it in a fair, responsible, balanced manner. We will achieve two years of pay freeze. We will manage performance pay. That's the right plan. It's about schools. It's about health care. It's about a better future for all Ontarians.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Toronto—Danforth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —Davenport.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Welcome back, Speaker. Welcome back.

My question is to the Premier. Today's the first day of school across Ontario; proud parents are taking their children to class, yet for months the Premier's been insisting that the sky was falling on Ontario schools. Can the Premier tell us: Where's the crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think if my honourable colleague checks the record, he'll notice that I've never used that word.

Let me just speak to the importance of all of us as Ontarians celebrating the progress that we keep making inside our schools. Ontario schools have never been stronger. Ontario parents have never been able to have more confidence in the education we're delivering to them inside our schools. Class sizes are down. Test

scores are up by a dramatic 16 points. Graduation rates are up by a dramatic 14 points. The increase in university enrolment in Ontario has gone up by 26%. That is double the national average.

Ontario families are on to the notion of education in a big way. They wanted us to do everything that we can to continue to support good-quality, publicly funded education for our kids. We've heard those marching orders loud and clear, Speaker. That's exactly what we're going to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

In a desperate attempt to win back majority power, the Premier insisted labour, peace and stability was at risk unless a simplistic and unconstitutional bill was passed immediately. He recalled the Legislature weeks early and, as late as last week, Liberals were planning to sit through the long weekend. Instead this morning, we've come back from a long weekend; kids are in class; and teachers are teaching them. Will the Premier admit that the sky was never falling?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm proud of the progress and the stability that we have in our schools. I want to commend Ontario teachers, Speaker. We have engaged them in a difficult conversation. It had to do with our financial circumstances—a need for us, together, to make an intelligent, responsible choice that puts students first. I know it's been somewhat difficult, but they're there today. They bring their usual professional approach, their devotion, their enthusiasm, their commitment to Ontario's children and young people, and I thank them for taking on that responsibility. I thank them for carrying on a conversation with our government that has not, in fact, encroached upon the classrooms.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Unfortunately, the Premier's desperate attempt to win back a majority will have a real impact. Constitutional experts tell us it's likely to be thrown out by the Supreme Court and cost us hundreds of millions of dollars. In the meantime, we will have conflict in our classrooms.

Later today, the Premier will shut down discussion of his short-sighted plan. Why won't he stop playing politics with our classrooms and push the pause button on this legislation before we wind up with a \$1-billion bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's a good opportunity yet again for Ontarians to understand the markedly conflicting advice we get from the opposition parties. The NDP tell us that we're being far too aggressive and we should not apply any restraint measures of any kind whatsoever at any time. They want to give teachers a pay hike. The PCs, on the other hand, are telling us we're being far too timid, that we should completely ignore process and jurisprudence, decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada, and instead apply a solution

holus-bolus across the board. That would not stand the test of the courts.

So we are in the middle. We're balanced, we're thoughtful and responsible. We're respecting process, as required, Speaker. But at the end of the day, we've got to draw a line in the sand. We've got to make a choice on behalf of families. What we're saying is we're going to hit the pause button on teacher pay, and the money that we have available for education will go into keeping class sizes down, which supports teaching jobs, roll out full-day kindergarten, which supports teaching jobs, and continue to put in place the supports we need to get those test scores even higher and those graduation rates up even further.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Earlier today, the Premier insisted that he wanted this legislation behind him sooner rather than later. But the Premier knows we're headed for a lengthy and divisive court battle. Given that this is one that is likely to see the bill overturned, does the Premier really believe a lengthy court battle that could cost families hundreds of millions of dollars is in the best interests of students?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much, Speaker. As I've had the chance to say in this House before, we didn't take the decision to introduce legislation lightly. But after six months of working with our partners in education, we felt that we needed to act in the best interests of students in taking these steps. As we have said on many occasions, if this bill is passed and then challenged in court, our position will be that it is constitutional, that we've respected the constitutionally protected right to a process of collective bargaining, and that, in any event, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, this bill is both reasonable and justified in all the circumstances.

In the supplementary, I look forward to having an opportunity to detail the very significant differences that exist between Ontario's circumstance and that in British Columbia.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Back to the Premier. After months of warning that Conservative proposals were simplistic and unconstitutional, the Premier is now plowing ahead with a bill that is just as simplistic, just as unconstitutional. Does the Premier have any evidence to back his claim that this legislation won't cost families millions more in the long run? Or is he once again attempting to buy short-term political gain by making risky commitments, knowing families will pay the price after the by-election?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I think it's important to take a moment to acknowledge what this legislation, if it does pass, saves our province.

It puts in place the agreement that we've reached with OECTA. More than 55,000 teachers have signed on to that agreement. Just last week, about 3,000 educational assistants also signed on to that agreement. So we've continued to work with our partners in education.

If we put this agreement in place right across the province, Speaker, it saves the province \$1.4 billion in this fiscal, \$250 million and \$540 million in the next—so about \$2 billion. And it averts \$473 million in additional costs. So there is a lot at risk, and it is a risk that we prevent the province from having to cross if we put in place this legislation. That is why we're asking for all members in this House to support it.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, legal experts say this bill won't stand up in court. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says it violates the charter. The government says they don't care, just like they didn't care when they cancelled gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville, where the full costs are still unknown but already climbing into the hundreds of millions. Why is the Premier rolling the dice with Ontario's classrooms?

1050

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me take a moment just to talk about the differences between the circumstances here in Ontario and in British Columbia.

In the BC case, the government gave 20 minutes' notice to the unions that they were changing the collective agreement. As a consequence, they were subject to the Supreme Court ruling, which found that they did not respect the constitutionally protected right to a process of consultation and consideration in good faith.

In Ontario, as we've said, we've been at the table in discussions since February and we've been clear about the challenges that we need to meet together. Even now, we're not closing the door on negotiated settlements.

Let me read from the Supreme Court ruling in the BC case:

"There was no meaningful consultation with unions before it became law. Union representatives expressed their desire to be further consulted. The Minister of Health ... telephoned a union representative 20 minutes before Bill 29 was introduced in the Legislative Assembly to inform the union that the government would be introducing" this.

That was the only consultation with unions before the act was passed, Speaker—very different circumstances here in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, sources have confirmed that airport shuttle buses have been outside the campaign headquarters of your Liberal candidate in the Kitchener–Waterloo by-election. We also know that Liberal ministers have been coming and going to Waterloo to bribe voters yet again

with their own money. But Premier, how did they get to Kitchener—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Michael Harris: Withdraw.

Did they wait in gridlock on the 401? Did they take the non-existent full-day GO service you promised and failed to deliver? Or did the ministers and Liberal staffers take the government's private plane? Premier, can you confirm today, yes or no, that the government's King Air private plane has not been used to shuttle yourself, ministers or political staff at any time during the last month to Kitchener–Waterloo?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think there's a really important opportunity for voters in Kitchener–Waterloo to vote in the upcoming by-election. I think it's a healthy exercise in democracy. There's an important collision of ideas and political philosophies that will take—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are driven in our determination to score a victory there, but we're also driving there back and forth in cars, Speaker, just so my colleagues understand. We look forward to the outcome of the by-election and we're grateful to have had the opportunity to present our particular program moving forward and the progress that we've secured by working together with people in that community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier: I'll give you a second chance on this one.

The Premier must believe he can get frequent flyer miles for the evasive answers that he's giving us this morning.

The government's King Air private plane is for official government purposes only. It's used as a campaign expense, and you know it.

Premier, don't you think that voters in Kitchener–Waterloo would find it unsettling that they have to sit in gridlock on the 401 while you and your Liberal ministers use a private plane to take a 15-minute flight to Kitchener–Waterloo? So I ask you again: Will you commit to reimburse Ontario taxpayers for the inappropriate use of the government's private plane, yes or no?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to reassure my honourable colleague that nobody has in fact used any government plane.

I also want to say: This is a rather desperate bid at this point in time. What about talking about our schools and the future of education in Ontario? What about talking about health care and some of the concerns people in Kitchener–Waterloo might have? What about talking about how we can better work hand in hand with organizations like Communitech, for example, or the universities and the college in that community? What about talking about the public transit system that we are continuing to invest in there? What about talking about the

investment we're going to make in a highway there? What about the new family health teams that we have put in place? What about the investment we made in their hospitals? What about the new schools we have built? What about the new medical schools? What about the new school of pharmacy we put in that riding? You'd think they might want to touch on some of those issues here today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Next week, all the legislative committees are set to disband, regardless of any unfinished business. I know that the Premier will say that he's anxious to hear a report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, but the reality is that the public accounts committee continues to uncover new information and details about what occurred at Ornge, calling back witnesses and getting to the bottom of how this could have all gone so wrong.

My question is simple: Despite the fact that I'm sure the government side is anxious to hear from a report, will the Premier guarantee that the public accounts committee will continue to meet to do their important work on getting to the bottom of what happened at Ornge, and that next week we will continue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us have been very cognizant of the work that's been done by the public accounts committee. I have the most recent statistics. It has now sat for 81 hours and heard from 56 witnesses who have appeared. It will be holding work this week.

The challenge that we have given to the public accounts committee is now that they have entertained witnesses, now that they've looked into it, that they come back with the types of recommendations that this government can use, that the Legislature can use, to make sure that the situation at Ornge will never take place again. We've seen the good action of the Minister of Health, but it now comes down to Bill 50, which we call on all members of the House to support when it comes forward.

As to the member's specific question about the public accounts committee, I think the member should check with his House leader, and what he'll find is the question over membership at committees expires next week, but the committees themselves will continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The scandal continues to astound not only the committee members but also the public. I thank the member for his answer.

The question is again back to the Premier. Ontarians want to be assured that this will never happen again. They want some guarantees that this type of lack of oversight won't occur again in the future, but the only way we can do that is if the committee is able to continue its job and continue to sit past next week. So will the Premier make a commitment today and promise to Ontarians that we will be able to continue to do our work to get to the bottom of what happened at Ornge?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's passing strange that when we sat down, the three parties, to discuss the composition of committees, in fact it was the opposition that asked that that composition be time-limited, which means that on Sunday, technically, at midnight, the composition motion expires. We are holding discussions with House leaders as to looking at a motion being brought to the Legislature to talk about it.

But you can't have it both ways. You can't stand up here and criticize the government for something that they've brought forward. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee has had weeks and weeks to look into the Ornge situation. We are calling on them to bring forward a report which will help us, which will help this government and future governments, in making sure that the proper oversight is given to agencies like Ornge in the future. We're also calling on them to pass Bill 50.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, as you know, this Legislature has been recalled early to deal with the very important issue of Ontario students and families, ensuring that school starts on time and continues uninterrupted.

1100

The Putting Students First Act is based on an agreement that the government reached with the Catholic teachers. Part of that memorandum of understanding with OECTA includes provisions around fair and transparent hiring processes. The party opposite says that this means that teachers will be hired based on seniority alone. Speaker, through you to the minister, is this true?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to speak to this issue yet again in the House, because it is absolutely untrue. Currently, there is no consistency or transparency on how new teachers are hired within and between boards. These new rules will ensure that boards and schools make hiring decisions based on a variety of criteria, including qualifications, suitability for the position, and the circumstance of the school, certainly not seniority alone. But jobs will be posted so young teachers know when they're available, because this isn't always the case right now, and hiring decisions won't be based on who you know.

Accountability is absolutely critical in a system funded by public dollars. I want to be clear: Management will still make the ultimate decision about who to hire, but that role comes with the responsibility to create a

process that can be accessed equally by everyone and understood by all. That's what we are driving for.

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

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister, for setting the record straight. As an MPP, this is something that I hear about from my constituents. In fact, just this Friday I had a young teacher at my constituency office complaining about hiring practices. I have constituents who are young teachers who are smart, keen and so eager to gain experience in their profession. Many of them don't know anyone at the school board, and they don't know what the process is to apply for permanent jobs.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what will you do to bring transparency and accountability to the teacher hiring processes in Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Just as has been mentioned, I'm sure everyone in this Legislature knows a young teacher who is trying to get a job in Ontario and who wants nothing more than to use the skills that they have and stand up in front of a classroom. That's why we're so committed to bringing transparency to hiring teachers in the province. That's what we want to see implemented across the sector.

Our strong preference was to see these provisions, by way of our Putting Students First Act, in every local agreement. But as I've said before, minority calls for reasonable compromise, and we'll instead move forward with these important changes in regulation under the Education Act. The establishment of consistent and fair hiring practices will strengthen our education system, and it's another way we're supporting young teachers, just like the change that was advanced for this September where retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 teaching days per year, down from 95, so that young teachers can gain the experience in our classrooms across the province.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. One hour of the Premier's time: That's all the committee that's investigating the scandal at Ornge asked of the Premier. He refused the committee's request to attend last Wednesday. He told everybody there was a cabinet meeting, and yet it turned out to be a photo op. So the committee offered the Premier an alternative date.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Frank Klees: That's tomorrow. And he yet again refused to appear.

The Toronto Star editorial headline said this: "Let the Premier clear the air." It went on to say, "The buck stops at the Premier's office, and he should be prepared to testify to clear the air."

Why won't the Premier agree to do that? What is he hiding?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I was hoping that there might be a real question there, but there wasn't.

I have spoken to this matter on several occasions in the past, but I do want to introduce a slightly different perspective on this. I think it's time to put patients ahead of partisan politics. Ornge provides air transportation to over 19,000 Ontarians every single year. You would think that this was a matter of some urgency, this issue. The committee has sat for many, many hours, and Ontarians still continue to await the outcome of their deliberations.

They say it's a matter of public safety, they say it's a matter of tremendous urgency, and yet they keep delaying coming forward with advice and recommendations that we might adopt on behalf of those 19,000 patients who are being transported every single year. I think it's time for us to receive those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. Speaker, what is it that the Premier does not understand about the committee's request that he appear? It seems everyone but the Premier understands the importance of his testimony. Here's what the Toronto Star had to say: "McGuinty has yet to explain, for example, why he said he'd only met Mazza once, when Mazza testified they'd met three times. He has yet to tell Ontarians why he and his ministers brushed off questions in the Legislature 16 months ago about the ballooning cost of the air ambulance service and why it took a string of front-page stories by the Star's Kevin Donovan and a damning report by the province's Auditor General, Jim McCarter, to get the government to take this issue seriously."

It goes on to say that Dalton McGuinty is the only one who can answer one more secret, and that is, according to the Toronto Star, "How did this fiasco happen on his watch?"

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

A gentle reminder to all members that when I say "thank you," that's the end of your question.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I acknowledge that the committee has been doing some important work, Speaker. I acknowledge as well that the criticism offered by an independent, objective third party, that is the Auditor General, said that we failed to bring the necessary oversight to bear over the activities at Ornge. He's right, Speaker, and we accept that. That's why we have made numerous changes, from the change in the leadership there to a new performance agreement.

We also have a specific legislative initiative. It's a bill before this House. It's Bill 50. We'd like to move forward with that. Just last week—just last week—when we sought unanimous consent so that it would receive quick passage; they denied us that. So they say this is not a matter of political gamesmanship, it's a matter of the public interest, but I think that speaks otherwise.

I encourage my honourable colleagues opposite to conclude the work of the committee, give us the recommendations, so we can ensure we are doing our utmost to

protect the safety of those 19,000 Ontarians who are transported by Ornge every single year.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Last night in Toronto, women and men took to the streets following the recent sexual assaults in the west end of our city, demanding safer homes, streets, and better supports for victims of sexual violence. Ending sexual violence requires dedicated and coordinated work from both the community and all levels of government, but funding from the McGuinty government for organizations like Victim Services Toronto has been frozen since 2007. Why is the government balancing its books on the backs of victims of violence?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'd like to take a moment in this Legislature to acknowledge, once again, that sexual violence is prevalent in the lives of far too many women. It is brought to stark light when we see circumstances in our city that one in three women will experience some form of sexual violence in her lifetime, and that, Mr. Speaker, is totally unacceptable.

Sexual violence has a devastating impact on the lives of victims and their families, and it will not be tolerated. That's why our government has taken strong action in the past, working very aggressively on a complete sexual violence action plan that we released last year that included \$15 million in investments over four years in public education, training and community services. We look to continue to support women who are survivors and to prevent this from happening in our city and across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Back to the Premier: Torontonians have been shocked by the recent rash of sexual assaults in our community. Organizations like Victim Services Toronto—the largest and only of its kind—is one of the very few places that victims of sexual assault can turn for support, financial help and protection from repeated assault. But funding for this program has fallen in real terms by more than 25% over the past 20 years, in spite of greatly increased demand. If the government recognizes the importance of programs like this and their role in ending sexual violence, when will your cuts end?

1110

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me just reiterate that it is certainly our hope that the Toronto police will bring whoever is responsible to justice. We urge everyone with information to come forward, because we want individuals like this off our streets in our city and around our province.

Let me highlight the sexual violence action plan, which included \$15 million in investments over four years in public education, training and community services. It was an example of the development of an action plan where we worked with the grassroots community,

where we worked with rape crisis centres and our sexual assault centres across the province, and provided \$3 million to Ontario's 42 sexual assault centres to help them better respond to women in their communities, like those women who may be seeking assistance in these circumstances.

We've also invested over \$3 million to expand the language interpreter services program to help sexual violence victims whose first language is not English or French. This program will help women in more than 60 languages.

In those investments, we look to better support women, and we look to support all of the women, in the city and across the province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I was pleased to have the opportunity to ask the minister about health care services for the residents in my riding of Ottawa Centre and to hear her report on the important successes we have seen in our city's emergency care. We have reduced wait times by ensuring access to care at the right time in the right place.

However, access to health care isn't just important for my constituents; it is important to every Ontarian. Our government has proudly worked hard for our families, our seniors and our residents to improve access to quality health care no matter where they live in our province. However, there's always more to do.

I would like to ask the minister how this government has increased access to health care services in other areas of Ontario besides my community of Ottawa.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That's a very good question. Throughout Ontario, we have made significant investments to improve access to care, and patients are seeing the difference.

Perhaps today I'll focus on part of our province: the Waterloo Wellington LHIN, for example. I'm very happy to report that 96% of people in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN now have a family doctor.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: That's great.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That is terrific—96%. And 194 more doctors are working in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN; 102 of those are family physicians; 92 are specialists. That's a 22% increase in the number of doctors. The population of that area is growing. It has grown by about 10% since 2003, but the number of doctors has gone up by 22%.

Waterloo-Wellington is not the only area that has seen improved access to care. In fact, across this great province, patients are getting better care, and they're getting it more quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Improving access to physicians in any community is vital to reducing wait times for Ontarians. As we discussed last week, this is an important component of how wait times are down in my commu-

ity of Ottawa. I'm proud of these accomplishments, most of all because the residents I represent are able to get the care they need faster and get back to living their lives. We all remember how long wait times for hip and knee surgeries used to be, and we all remember how wait times kept increasing due to chronic underfunding of our hospitals under past governments.

As proud as I am that we have experienced significant improvements in Ottawa, I think it is important for Ontarians in other regions to know how this government has been working on their behalf. To the minister: How has this government increased investments to reduce wait times in other areas of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member is quite right. We have increased investments in our hospitals: in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN, for example. At Cambridge Memorial Hospital, funding has gone up by 25%; at St. Mary's General Hospital, an increase of 42%; at Grand River hospital, an increase of 61%.

What's important is not the increase in funding but the impact that that's having on patients. Those investments are paying off. Wait times have come down dramatically. Cancer surgery: We are now meeting our target; we've reduced wait times for cancer surgery by 43%. Cataract surgery: We're meeting our target; we're down 47%. Hip surgery: We're meeting our target; we've reduced the wait time by 58%. We've taken almost a year off the wait time for hip surgery. Knee surgery has been cut in half. Wait time for an MRI has been down 28%.

We've come a long way, Speaker, working with our doctors, our hospitals—more to do, but we've come a long way.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker, and welcome back.

My question is to the Premier. Premier, you claim that your government wants to get to the bottom of the Ornge scandal, but, based on your actions, all you want to do is run from the truth. In order to provide the House with an accurate recommendation, the committee needs all members, all witnesses, to come forward so we can get the whole truth.

Premier, you've now refused twice to appear before the committee and answer for your involvement in the mess at Ornge—just one hour of your time. Ontarians want and deserve to know: Will you stop cowering behind the privilege that protects you in this House, do the honourable thing and testify about your involvement in Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm certain, if there were good questions that my honourable colleague wanted to put to me, he would have put one to me just now, Speaker, but he hasn't.

Let me tell you a little bit about what we've been able to do, working together on the Ornge issue as a com-

mittee and in this Legislature, to demonstrate just how thorough it's been.

There have been, until today, 470 questions related to Ornge asked in this Legislature. There have been countless questions as well that I've received from the media. They have received 56 witnesses. They've taken up 81 hours of committee time over the course of 16 days. They've examined thousands of pages of documents, and they've led to the production of over 800 pages of Hansard. It seems to me, Speaker, that the committee has been nothing if not thorough.

What we need now is to move ahead with Bill 50—setting aside the recommendations for a moment, move ahead with Bill 50, which enhances oversight and accountability at Ornge.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, my question again goes back to the Premier. It's clear that the Premier is hiding from something or protecting someone. I would ask you a question today, but you would avoid it. That's why we want you at the committee. Too many of your key players and Liberal insiders in this scandal are connected to you, the Premier, including former Liberal Party president Alf Apps, campaign manager Don Guy, Lisa Kirbie, Jennifer Tracey, and the Premier's office's current senior adviser, health, Sophia Ikura. Out of all the witnesses that have testified before the committee, only two have refused: the infamous Dr. Chris Mazza was the first, and you are the second. We all know why Dr. Mazza was hiding his involvement from the committee. The question becomes, what are you hiding, Premier, and will you testify before the committee tomorrow?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And none of that was rehearsed whatsoever, Mr. Speaker—none of that whatsoever.

Since my honourable colleague doesn't have any questions of substance here today, I wonder if we might return to a matter of real substance. That's Bill 50. It's An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. We'd like to move ahead with that.

We have in place new leadership at Ornge. We have in place a new performance agreement. We have the recommendations from the auditor. There's an ongoing OPP investigation. But there's something that we can do together while we wait for them to come up with their recommendations, Speaker, and that's to move ahead with Bill 50. So I'd ask my honourable colleague and his colleagues in his caucus, as well as the NDP, why is it that they continue to oppose Bill 50, which enhances this government's power of oversight over Ornge?

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, this government announced the creation of the

Northern Policy Institute, confirming what northerners have known for years: The Liberals don't get the north. The last thing the north needs is another initiative or another report to tell us what we need. We know what we need. The problem is that this government isn't listening. What the north needs now is real action and real investment.

My question is simple. Since the government has now admitted it has no plan for the north, will it commit today to creating a committee of northern MPPs who can provide real consultation and action to move our economy forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: On Friday, the members for Thunder Bay–Superior North and Thunder Bay–Atikokan, the member from Sault Ste. Marie and I were very, very proud to announce that we have and are going to move forward with the Northern Policy Institute.

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With all due respect to the member who asked the question, it's just another example of how out of touch the third party is with the wishes of northerners. They're not reflective of the northern reality. Northerners, over the many years we consulted on the northern growth plan, asked for one thing: that we establish a Northern Policy Institute that would be an independent body; that it be made up of experts, people who are not appointed by order-in-council; that they ensure that they reflect the uniqueness of northern Ontario. We did that on Friday. We're very proud of it, and so are northerners.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Back to the Premier: You're not fooling anyone with this latest announcement. The problem isn't that the north isn't providing the input; it's that you're not listening to us. We have said no to the Far North Act, no to the closure of the travel information centres and no to this government's backroom deals on the Ring of Fire. MPPs in this Legislature voted in favour of creating a committee that would bring northern voices to the table and would not have diverted \$5 million from the northern Ontario heritage fund, but you said no to the north.

I ask again: Will you commit today to respecting the democratic will of this House and create a northern committee, or are you once again going to say no to the north?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The reality that we're faced with here is that northerners asked this government to establish a Northern Policy Institute. The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association all asked for the same thing: that we establish an independent body, a body that will focus on policy for northern Ontario, a body that is independent of government and that will rely on expert advice from around northern Ontario in order to shape the policy that's going to affect northern Ontario. The reality is that this is very, very popular across northern

Ontario. The biggest reality is that this third party is clearly out of sync and does not understand the priorities of northern Ontario.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the minister responsible for the 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. Minister, over the summer we heard some very strange claims coming from the opposition about the games. It's very clear from your previous public comments and from information that's posted on the Toronto 2015 website that the overall budget for the games remains unchanged at \$1.4 billion. I also saw that TO2015 has committed to ongoing regular public reports, including budget updates beginning in the fall. Despite this, some opposition members seem to be claiming that the budget for the games is unknown. The strangest request is that they've called for the government to release details of projects that are currently under tender. Minister, could you please clear this up?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member from Oakville for the question. I appreciate the opportunity to clear up any confusion that may exist across the aisle. As the member mentioned, an updated budget for the games, as well as audited financial statements, are available online at the 2015 website, as well as the Ontario.ca Pan Am website.

Regarding procurement: Unfortunately, members opposite do appear to be confused about how the process works. The member from Barrie has recklessly requested that Ontario reveal specific project costs before we even receive the bids. Doing so would be irresponsible and would result in inflated bids. We're not going to do that. Instead, we're going to get the best value for Ontario taxpayers. That means we're going to continue to use a procurement process that's open, fair, competitive and transparent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Minister. I certainly appreciate that clarification. I only wish the confusion ended across the aisle, though, as well. Over the summer, the PC caucus appeared to be divided as to which financial model should be used for large infrastructure projects. I know that Infrastructure Ontario has built a reputation for very successful partnerships with the private sector. I was always under the impression that the PCs were in favour of private sector investment, but the member from Barrie seemed to side with the NDP over the summer in calling for Infrastructure Ontario to reject partnerships with the private sector.

Minister, can you confirm that alternative finance procurement is being used to deliver Pan Am projects and that this is also the proven method for delivering large projects of this type?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I, too, was also surprised by the member from Barrie's position. In a July 15 article on Simcoe.com, the member is quoted as saying this: "This kind of public-private partnership typically ends up cost-

ing taxpayers substantially more.” But as far as I can tell, his leader disagrees. In a 2011 interview about public transit in Toronto, Tim Hudak said this: “I think we need to look at public-private partnerships for the infrastructure in our province.”

It’s very difficult to know where the PC Party stands from one day to the next. In fact, we are using a tried-and-true procurement method that has brought more than 50 alternative financing projects to market since 2005, worth more than \$23 billion and saving taxpayers more than \$500 million.

I’m very happy to confirm that the procurement for the major Pan Am venues is proceeding on schedule, and that the details of the budget and venue status are already publicly available on our website.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, a continuous flood of members from your cabinet have been linked to the Ornge scandal, from health minister after health minister, right to your current Minister of Natural Resources and now yourself. It doesn’t end there. You’ve been linked to the scandal through former Liberal president Alf Apps, though your campaign manager Don Guy, and countless other Liberal insiders.

Premier, third time is the charm. Ontarians want you to stop dodging requests to testify. Will you finally agree to come clean before the committee and millions of Ontarians about your involvement in Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that with every passing question it becomes more and more apparent how consumed my honourable colleagues opposite are by partisanship and gamesmanship when it comes to the Ornge matter.

We accept our responsibility for not bringing the necessary oversight to bear. If I’ve said that once, Speaker, I’ve said it at least a dozen times. We’ve made some very dramatic changes. We have new leadership in place. We have a new performance agreement there. We’ve adopted wholeheartedly the recommendations put forward by the auditor. We have a lot of those contained within Bill 50, and we’d like to move forward with that, but my honourable colleagues oppose that positive step forward.

Again, I think the responsibility we bear in government is to uphold the greater public interest. That demands at this point in time that we receive recommendations from the committee so we can get on with the work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The people of Ontario are wondering when their Premier plans to be open and honest about his involvement in Ornge. How many more connections to the Premier will it take for him to finally testify to the public accounts committee? Despite your answers in the House, or lack thereof, the committee knows that you’ve met with Chris Mazza more than once. In fact Alf Apps, in a memo, tells Dr. Mazza to downplay your meeting at

lunch with George Smitherman. Premier, your fingerprints are all over Ornge. They’re all over this scandal. Why won’t you testify before the public accounts committee tomorrow and clear the air before the by-elections?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my honourable colleague, I know he’s still relatively new here but he should not allow them to do that to him. He should not allow them to do that to him.

I think the question that I would have on behalf of the good people of Barrie is, why is it that the opposition parties are standing in the way of Bill 50? Why are they standing in the way of us taking a positive approach that is solutions-based when it comes to addressing some of the issues at Ornge?

We’d like to bring the necessary legislative oversight to bear on Ornge. We can’t do that until we have Bill 50 become law. Again, I ask my honourable colleague and his caucus colleagues as well if they’ll lend us their support in that regard.

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CORRECTIONAL FACILITY EMPLOYEES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety. For over three weeks, Minister, the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre has been in a lockdown mode. The guards initially went out because management refused to allow them to take necessary safety measures related to weapons search. Despite some progress in working out search protocol, the jail refuses to allow the guards to go back to work. Your ministry and the labour ministry decided the situation was resolved to their satisfaction—not to the people who perform this dangerous work day in and day out.

Instead of disciplining guards who simply don’t want to work in unsafe conditions, why won’t this minister finally resolve this dangerous situation without any management retaliation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I appreciate the question very much; I had a question like this last week. I’ve met with the official of the union at the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre. Again, the staff have been working diligently all week and during the weekend to try to resolve the problem.

But again, there is a misunderstanding, or not an agreement, about this work stoppage. Is this labour-related, or is it health and safety-related? After the visit of the Ministry of Labour inspector, they determined that the work refusal claims did not meet the criteria outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The reasons for refusal were, in fact—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —[inaudible] aspect of a correctional officer’s job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Actually, when someone went into the jail, all the managers apparently had their protective equipment on. So that’s interesting.

Minister, jail cells at the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre are about eight feet wide and 12 feet long. In many cells, there are three inmates, with the third prisoner sleeping on a plastic-coated mattress on the concrete floor. A jail that was built to house 510 inmates now houses close to 600. Is this minister going to make this situation bad to worse, or will she immediately take action to deal with this unsafe and potentially violent situation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, the safety of those who are working in our jail system and of the inmates is of the utmost importance for us, and we want to make sure that everyone there is safe. Unfortunately, we cannot control who comes to our jail—it's not like we are closing the door. So the doors are open. At times, especially those who we call weekenders—when they come into the jail during the weekend, yes, it's sometimes overcrowded. We're going to admit it. It is overcrowded. But we do try to move inmates to other correctional facilities to make sure we are keeping our jails safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my point of order refers to standing order 23, subsections (h) and (i). Specifically, it relates to the Premier's responses to questions relating to the Ornge air ambulance service.

Over the last couple of months, the Premier has repeatedly referred to opposition questions as being motivated by partisan interests. Subsection (i), as you know, refers specifically to the imputing of "false or unavowed motives" to members of this House. I refer you—I actually have copies of eight specific references. The Premier again today, in response to questions relating to the Ornge air ambulance scandal, twice referred to the opposition as being motivated and having partisan motive in asking their question.

On August 30, the Premier said this: "I want to assure Ontarians they're for the partisan interest"—referring to the opposition—"we remain solely for the public interest."

Again on August 30, the Premier—Speaker, I'll wait until I have your attention.

Again on August 30, the Premier said this: "Speaker, I've spoken on countless occasions about how my honourable colleagues in opposition see the matter of Ornge purely as a partisan political game."

I ask you, Speaker, to rule on this issue. I think it's straightforward. It is an insult to us and the members of the opposition, and it is clearly not in order—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to remind the member that I'm standing, and indeed I have been listening. I did not hear anything that was untoward in the House, but I will take a moment to remind all members that to impugn one's motive is something that I listen for very carefully, and I did not hear that today.

The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a different point of order. Mr. Speaker, earlier today, a question was asked about the

use of King Air and Waterloo-Wellington regional airport. I'd like to inform the House we have confirmed that in fact not only has it not happened during the campaign; it hasn't landed or taken off at all in 2012—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. Again, I will remind all members that when I stand, everyone sits.

That is not a point of order.

The member from Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, with due respect, I do ask you to do this for me. If you would take into consideration the information that I will present to you that relates to the Premier's—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have an opportunity to submit to me anything that they wish in terms of documents. But I would suggest to the member: I did rule on it and I have ruled on it. You don't like the ruling.

The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to make sure I properly understood the government House leader. He said that King Air has never been used in 2012. Is that what I heard?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes.

This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BACK-TO-SCHOOL BARBECUE

Mr. Rod Jackson: This past Saturday, I had the pleasure to host a back-to-school barbecue in my riding in St. Vincent Park. We had perfect weather and close to 200 people attend on the long weekend. We had many young families and their children, and we had a great time.

I'm pleased to announce that together we raised over \$1,000, and thousands of school supplies, for students and families in need. One third of households say that back-to-school shopping put a burden on their household budgets. As a testament to the strength of the community in Barrie, people have taken it upon themselves to continue the back-to-school supplies drive and continue to drop off items at my constituency office. It makes me very proud.

Thank you to all those who contributed to the success of the event. Jim Fraser, a teacher in my riding, organized the egg- and balloon-toss games for the kids. Children's entertainer Steve Kavaratzis—I hope I got that right, Steve—led the kids through interactive activities; Lawrence Vindum, from The Butcher Shop, donated all the food, and it was amazing; Scoops and Cones gave out ice cream for free; and the Enbridge community team

prepared the barbecue. Twenty community volunteers came out to help. I'd like to thank my constituency team for all their great work. Fun was certainly had by all.

Everyone came together to launch our first annual back-to-school barbecue. It supported a great cause in the process in our community, and I look forward to next year's.

SIKH CHANNEL

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm very pleased to rise in the House today to share with the House a great occasion that occurred yesterday. September 3 was the official launch of the Sikh Channel. The Sikh Channel is a well-known channel that broadcasts currently in the UK, across Europe and also in India. They have a very large viewership and are a long-running channel, and are now moving into Canada. Yesterday was the official launch ceremony. Many people were in attendance, and it was a great honour to be there.

The initiative of the Sikh Channel was, first and foremost, an education program. The purpose of the channel was to provide the broader community with awareness and knowledge about the Sikh faith. The market, or the audience, was Sikh and non-Sikh. Particularly when we see tragedies like what happened in Wisconsin and very sad and tragic events of that nature, we realize that fear and ignorance are the breeding grounds for hatred. When we can replace that fear and ignorance with love and understanding, we can move towards a more accepting climate.

I hope that the Sikh Channel can be a part of that initiative by providing education and informative programming about what the Sikh faith is about, so that we can move towards a more understanding climate, so we can all live in greater harmony. I salute the Sikh Channel for its great initiatives in providing that education.

PREMIER'S AWARD FOR AGRI-FOOD INNOVATION EXCELLENCE

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I rise today to congratulate local innovators who recently received a Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence at a ceremony in Guelph. The award recognizes the success of the recipient's innovations which improve existing products, create jobs and drive economic growth.

Award recipients recognized in Guelph included Carrick Wines and Ciders, from Mildmay; Conlee Farms, from Listowel; Creemore 100 Mile Store, Creemore; Delhome Farms, Milverton; Full of Beans, Bornholm; Hilton Soy Foods, Staffa; Jones Feed Mills Ltd., from Linwood; Nicholyn Farms, from Phelpston; Primeridge Pure, from Markdale; Simcoe County Cattlemen's Association, Shanty Bay; and Stemmler Meats and Cheese Inc., from Heidelberg.

Our government began this program six years ago to recognize innovators for their great ideas and help spread awareness of their farm and food businesses. We salute

these individuals for having the passion to turn their ideas into results, and we thank them for all that they do to provide us with fresh, local foods in our homes, in our communities, and help to grow Ontario's agriculture industry.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Todd Smith: We all know of the McGuinty government's shameful record on manufacturing job losses. The numbers are simply staggering: 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost since this government took power.

Few communities know the bitter sting of the Liberal economic disaster better than Kitchener-Waterloo. In 2006, they lost BFGoodrich and 1,100 jobs there. In 2008, they lost Kitchener Frame, formerly known as Budd Automotive, and another 1,200 jobs there. In 2014, they're scheduled to lose Maple Leaf Foods and yet another 1,200 jobs. That Maple Leaf Plant goes back to J.M. Schneider's original butcher shop that started in Kitchener back in 1890. It survived two World Wars, a Great Depression, a Cold War and a half-dozen recessions but couldn't survive through this government's reign.

This government's policies are killing manufacturing in this province. High-paying jobs are leaving Ontario for provinces and states with lower energy costs, lower tax rates and less regulation. No one knows this better than those living in Kitchener-Waterloo.

I was at the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce all-candidates meeting just last Wednesday. The only party articulating a clear vision for economic growth for that riding and the entire province of Ontario just happens to be the PC Party of Ontario and our leader, Tim Hudak.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: On September 1, I joined the community of Pellatt for a fundraising pig roast in support of the community's volunteer fire department.

Like most communities across Ontario, Pellatt and the surrounding area is made safer thanks to a group of volunteers who are willing to risk their own lives to save others.

I would like to take this moment to commend not only the members of the Pellatt United Firefighters but all volunteer firefighters in my riding and across the province.

It's hard to believe that in this day and age these dedicated individuals not only have to give up their own time to train but to also fundraise for the equipment that is essential for them to do their jobs safely and effectively, including personal safety equipment.

Volunteer firefighters provide essential and life-saving services not only in the case of fires but also by acting as first responders in other emergencies, such as car accidents and other things. That is why today I want to take the opportunity not only to say thank you but to call on

my counterparts in this chamber to provide firefighters with the support they need.

Saying thank you is one thing, but we all need to do our parts to ensure that our words of appreciation are supported by adequate and reliable funding to our brave first responders.

SECOND BASE YOUTH SHELTER

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak on the accomplishments of a very special group of young people in my riding.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the youth at Second Base Youth Shelter for successfully organizing the spectacular Community Fun Fair Fundraiser on August 25, 2012.

Second Base is a 56-bed co-ed shelter for youth aged 16 to 21 years. It is the second-largest youth shelter in the city of Toronto and the only youth shelter between Victoria Park Avenue and Oshawa. The shelter is located in my riding of Scarborough Southwest and houses and serves youth from all parts of the city of Toronto.

At Second Base, youth are facing vast challenges, and they find a supportive, non-judgmental, structured and empowered environment. Here, they have the opportunity to achieve personal growth, self-confidence and independence.

The youth at this shelter came together and organized this event in order to build stronger relations with the community and raise money for Second Base. They offer safe, fun space for the whole community to gather and enjoy themselves in the spirit of summer, and offer a wide variety of activities.

Please join me in congratulating the youth of Second Base for their dedication and motivation in planning the fundraiser. Their enthusiasm in establishing positive relations within the community of Scarborough Southwest is admirable, and their leadership skills must be acknowledged.

UNITED WAY OF LEEDS AND GRENVILLE

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege to pay tribute to an organization in Leeds–Grenville making a real difference to people of all ages and all walks of life.

The United Way of Leeds and Grenville is busily preparing to launch its 55th annual campaign, an effort that provides essential funding for its 28 member agencies.

Thanks to the unwavering support of the United Way, these agencies provide hope and help to more than 36,000 people across my riding. That means that one in every three residents of Leeds–Grenville benefit directly from the United Way campaign.

Unfortunately, I'll be here at Queen's Park a week from tomorrow, when the 2012 kickoff breakfast officially launches the campaign. However, I wish executive director Judi Baril and her team, president Nancy Duffy

and her board, and campaign co-chairs Cathy and Ben TeKamp and their team all the best in reaching this year's goal.

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It's a daunting task to go into a fundraising campaign in these tough economic times, but it's reassuring to Judi and her team to know they can count on the incredible generosity of the people of Leeds–Grenville. In fact, despite that difficult economy, last year the United Way made history as it hit the \$1-million mark for its first time. The people of Leeds–Grenville dug deep because they know the agencies supported by our United Way are there when their friends, neighbours and their own families need them the most.

I want to wish you all the best on a successful campaign.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to congratulate the town of Ajax on being selected to host the softball and baseball events for the Toronto Pan/Parapan American Games in 2015.

Hundreds of athletes and thousands of spectators will pass through my riding of Ajax–Pickering, showcasing our wonderful community and cultural diversity on the world stage. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity will provide lasting local economic benefits and provide a world-class sport venue here in Ajax for the community to use for years to come.

My Premier personally led the bid to host these games in Ontario, and I'm looking forward to the substantial job increases, as are the mayor and all members of Ajax council, with the tourism influxes and sport infrastructure improvements that will inevitably occur from hosting part of these games in Ajax. By ensuring that these games are affordable, accessible and boasting exceptional conditions for the athletes, I'm confident that our Premier's vision will come to full fruition at the Ajax Sportsplex.

So grab a glove and some Cracker Jacks, and let's get ready to play ball in Ajax.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good to see you back, sir.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise to express my appreciation to the residents of Elmvale who joined with me in an effort to restore medical lab services in the community. The decision to close Elmvale's specimen collection centre by the Georgian Bay General Hospital concerned all of us. Relocating those services to Midland caused great pains for those who rely on health care services that are closer to home. It caused hardship for families, especially those with elderly parents and relatives, and longer lineups, longer drives, and inconveniences like paying for parking at the Midland hospital just to get your blood checked.

After the closure, we immediately launched a campaign to get the lab in Elmvale reopened. I brought the issue to the floor of this Legislature more than 22 times on 22 different occasions, not including countless letters and various meetings with senior government officials. Those efforts were aided immensely by petitions and letters that were collected by Focus Elmvale and countless merchants who displayed our petition in their stores. We also enjoyed the strong support of Mayor Collins, Councillor Perry Ritchie and the rest of Springwater council.

Thanks to these persistent efforts, I was happy to announce this summer that LifeLabs, one of the largest providers of lab services in Ontario, would be opening the new specimen collection centre beginning July 31. LifeLabs is a leader in their field, and I want to welcome them to the community and thank them for their commitment to Elmvale.

Mr. Speaker, the lab is now open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. in the medical building at 35 Queen Street West. I encourage all residents to make good use of the restored services.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated September 4, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Reports by committees?

Introduction of bills?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Isn't it motions?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We will do that once I'm finished with introduction of bills. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CONSULTING INC. ACT, 2012

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr6, An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to be at the ready here to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

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

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the Dalton McGuinty government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to sign and support it on behalf of the seniors of my riding and present it to Tameem, the page.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection

Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Sydney.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices” continue to drop; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

“Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

“Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario.”

I affix my signature.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north’s economy; and

“Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

“Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

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

“That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately.”

I wholeheartedly agree. I sign my signature and give it to page Dia.

1520

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the member churches of the Seaway Valley Presbytery are subject to the provisions of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08; and

“Whereas these churches and other non-profit organizations in eastern Ontario’s rural communities cannot afford to pay for the expensive testing required by this regulation or the volunteers to transport water samples to provincially accredited laboratories in urban centres hours away; and

“Whereas public health laboratories have the equipment necessary to conduct the testing required under Ontario regulation 319/08;

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

“That the Minister of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to allow non-profit organizations to have water testing done at existing public health laboratories at no cost.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Jacqueline.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

“Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

“Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

“Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

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

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones’s Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act.”

I obviously support this petition, and affix my name to it and give it to page Leo.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the report from Ontario’s Auditor General on the province’s air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers’ dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised; and

“Whereas Ornge officials created a ‘mini-conglomerate’ of private entities that enriched former senior

officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt; and

“Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined; and

“Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent; and

“Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge; and

“Whereas the latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle, where \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted;

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

“The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge.”

I agree with this petition, sign it and pass it to page Jacqueline.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government’s plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my doctor’s ability to provide care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

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

“Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care.”

These names were gathered by Dr. Kinga Koprowicz from Kirkfield, and hundreds of her patients have signed.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

“Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

“Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

“Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to ‘operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being’; and

“Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to under-

take X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

“Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

Mr. Speaker, that’s a rather long petition, but I agree entirely with it and will affix my signature to it.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real ‘plan’ for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

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

“That the provincial government call for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I support this petition and give it to page Jenna to give to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government’s plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my

doctor's ability to provide care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

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

"Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care."

I agree with this petition and will be signing it and handing it off to page Tameem.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully support this petition and I will sign it and give it to page Leo.

1530

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

"Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

"Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

"Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

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

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones's Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act."

I'm happy to sign that and pass it to page Jacqueline.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and

That the vote on second reading shall not be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet on Wednesday, September 5, 2012, from 4:45 p.m. until 8 p.m. and Thursday, September 6, 2012, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill and on Thursday, September 6, 2012, following routine proceedings until 8 p.m. for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Thursday, September 6, 2012. At 7 p.m. on Thursday, September 6, 2012, those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, September 10, 2012. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Milloy has moved notice of government motion number 48. Mr. Milloy?

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm only going to speak for a minute or two and try to translate what has just happened into a little bit more of a description. What we've put forward today is known in parliamentary parlance as a time allocation motion. It effectively is outlining, if adopted by this Legislature, a path forward for the legislation to complete second reading. I should point out to members that we've had about eight and a half hours of debate, which reflects, I think, a fairly generous amount of time for discussion. It would then move through the committee process and be reported back for third reading, again outlining the parameters of the debate going forward.

I think members will understand why we've come to this point to bring it forward. The fact of the matter is, we're here in the Legislature two weeks earlier than usual. The House was expected to resume its business again next week, but we've unfortunately hit a situation with the education system that needs to be addressed with some urgency, hence the motion that's put forward.

Again, I think members of the House have had an opportunity, through debate, through question period, to be aware of the six months of negotiation that have taken place between our government and a number of teachers' unions across this province. We have had some success. Obviously, the one that comes to mind is the OECTA agreement with the English Catholic teachers. We've had an agreement with that union which represents franco-phone teachers, as well as a smaller union that deals with some of the support staff around issues—psychologists and individuals like that.

Although we have made some progress, and at the same time we've seen boards who have settled with these

unions, it has by no means been universal. Certainly, as school begins—today, of course, being the first day of school—there is a concern about how we move forward. Will we see disruptions? Can parents have the type of certainty that they want, as their children go off to school?

There's also a fiscal reality. The fact is that on September 1 of this year, due to the nature of contracts that have been negotiated in the past, we're going to see what's called a rollover, where, in the absence of contracts, certain increases in pay will come forth, and there's going to be a cost ultimately to the treasury of literally hundreds of millions of dollars—\$473 million, to be exact. So we've had to move with some degree of speed on this. Although the bill has a retroactive component to it, we have committed to have the bill passed as close to September 1 as possible.

Last week, as I say, we had over eight hours of debate on second reading. There was an attempt to move the bill through by unanimous consent. We had evening sittings. Now we are taking the next step, in terms of time allocation.

I close, though, by saying that we do none of this with a great deal of enthusiasm. We respect collective bargaining in this province. We would like to have seen agreements with all the teachers' unions. We would like to not have to bring forward this legislation. We would like, too, that the legislation could pass through the usual course.

But there is urgency that's associated with this. I think all of us recognize, with school having started and the clock ticking, that we need to set out a path for this piece of legislation, and that's what this motion does. I have brought it forward today, as I say, with a great deal of consideration. I realize the seriousness of a time allocation motion, but I think it matches the seriousness which we find in our education system.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 115. I have a somewhat unique perspective on this bill because, to the best of my knowledge, I am the only MPP who is a paid-up member of one of the teacher federations. I'm the only MPP who can speak first-hand about the challenges teachers face in the classroom, about the increased complexity of education, of the need to consistently update and innovate, not only to reflect the changing technology in the world around us but to ensure that our students are exposed to the most thoughtful and thorough curriculum and the most advanced teaching technologies. That is the only way to ensure our youth are prepared for the challenges facing the highly skilled jobs of the 21st century and to guarantee their work lives will be as productive as those of the generations which came before them.

I was elected with an extremely positive view of the potential of this great province. I come from the lovely community of Trent Hills, an exceptionally beautiful place, and I encourage each and every member here to

visit Trent Hills. It's blessed with almost all the amenities found in the larger urban centre, while still having the strong sense of community that is most often found in small towns and rural Ontario.

1540

Since coming to Queen's Park, it saddens me to say I have seen far too much time in this chamber devoted to frivolous and juvenile attempts to play politics. As MPPs, I still believe we should be devoting our time and talents to finding solutions to the very real impediments preventing our province and its people and businesses from reaching their full potential. This week, we have seen more examples of game-playing, starting with this bill before us this evening.

When the government signed the last collective agreement two years ago, they obviously knew the exact date on which it would end. For the past two years, this Liberal government has said it has recognized that Ontario is in dire financial straits. However, despite that, they have continued to overspend in just about every area and continued to drive up our provincial debt. Ignoring payroll expenses would suggest a government that truly did not care about the long-term financial health of this province.

Already, interest costs on the provincial debt exceed \$10 billion a year, and that grows by another \$1 billion each and every year. If debt service were a ministry, it would now be the third-largest ministry in the province of Ontario after only health care and education, and before all 22 other ministries, including transportation, social services, infrastructure and community safety.

What could \$10 billion buy? You could buy 2,000 MRI machines every year. You could quadruple disability payments to Ontarians who, through no fault of their own, cannot work. You could convert every single locomotive, bus, truck and car owned by the government and every single government building so they ran on hydrogen, providing global leadership in the race to a cleaner environment. In short, you could do any number of things that would add real value to the lives of Ontarians and ensure a more productive and healthier economy here in Ontario.

Rather than reflect on these serious statistics and making sure that they adopted a comprehensive plan to control all aspects of their spending back in the spring when they went through the budget process, the government chose to wait until the last minute to deal with the billions of dollars of spending in our schools. Based on their actions, they only realized a couple of weeks ago that the teacher contracts would expire on August 31. What a disappointment, not only to the hard-working teachers who have been kept in limbo waiting for the government to act, but to the school board trustees who have been cut out of their role as negotiators of contracts with their own teachers, and most of all, an insult and unnecessary cause for concern to literally millions of parents who didn't know whether the school year would begin on time.

How ironic that the education Premier has now created a crisis in our education system that vastly exceeds any

issue he ever critiqued when the PC government was in office. At least the PCs could honestly claim they were cleaning up the mess of Bob Rae and the NDP government. Premier Dalton McGuinty has only himself to blame for the current situation in our schools. He thought the teachers were puppets who could dance to his tune, no matter what he did to their collective agreements. I think it has come as a surprise that my former colleagues weren't that weak-willed.

So the Premier has deliberately waited until the last minute. He has deliberately created this sense of outrage within the education community and deliberately upset the broader public. On this issue, the public are way ahead of the government and the media. They're mad. They know when they are being used as by-election pawns. But they won't be fooled—not this time.

The government has created a crisis, but I want to make it very clear to the parents and students in Northumberland–Quinte West and across all of Ontario that our party isn't going to play games. We aren't going to hold up passage of this bill. We want teachers and parents to be able to focus on the only thing that they should be thinking about at this time of the year: Getting our kids into the classrooms. Our bottom line was and is: We will do whatever it takes to ensure that there are no interruptions to the school year.

That's why we're willing to step in and save the self-proclaimed education Premier from the fix he's gotten himself into. This bill is the first tangible proof that the government might actually finally be willing to take the first steps needed to get spending under control. During the election last fall, our party called for a two-year public sector wage freeze for all recipients of provincial funding, and this bill enacts that freeze, at least on teachers. This is an important first step, but it is far from the solution to the financial woes that this province faces. In fact, this bill and the Liberal treatment of teachers single out just one group and don't enact a blanket freeze that would cover all provincial funding recipients and which would save \$2 billion a year. Rather than be fair, rather than ensure that the same provisions cover all provincial recipients, this government has chosen to attack selective targets while leaving other public sector unions alone.

Ontarians have to wonder why. First, it was the doctors. They willingly agreed to the same two-year freeze we had proposed, but that wasn't good enough for the Liberals. They had to whack the doctors with another \$1 billion worth of cuts, leaving many doctors contemplating moving out of the province or retiring. That doesn't exactly improve the status of health care here in Ontario.

What about the horse racing industry—60,000 workers engaged in a practice that has been a mainstay of rural Ontario for more than a century, an industry that will be snuffed out, perhaps completely, according to the expert panel appointed by this government? Despite the government's spin, the slots-at-racetracks partnership is just that: a partnership, not a subsidy. The racetracks generate

over \$1.1 billion in revenue for the province, and that's not counting the money that's kept by the tracks, the horse racers and the host municipalities.

Let me put that into perspective so that all Ontarians can truly appreciate exactly how much the rest of Ontario will suffer as a result of the Liberal decision to kill the horse racing industry. The \$1.1 billion generated by race-tracks across the province is more money than this government will give to the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. So the next time you hear about a grant to stimulate jobs, or an investment in a new and promising technology, or funding to promote tourism in Ontario, or sports in Ontario or the arts in Ontario, remember that every one of those dollars came from the racetrack. Remember as well that after April 1, either the government will have to slash services by \$1.1 billion or else it will have to increase taxes to make up for the loss of money from the racetracks.

Oh, that's right. For those who don't care about the financial future of the province, there is a third Liberal option, and that is to increase the provincial debt by another \$1.1 billion every year. The government could have solved all their problems back in the spring, but instead of starting negotiations in a timely fashion, the government has created this crisis, and it's up to all of us to solve their problems.

1550

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my colleague the member from Timmins–James Bay will be joining us shortly and will be sharing my time with me.

Speaker, as you are well aware, the urgency of this matter is directly tied to a by-election vote that is happening this Thursday in Kitchener–Waterloo. That is the urgency of the matter before us today. If this government had felt that there was an urgent issue regarding our schools that had to be addressed, based on the arguments they've made before, they could have come before this Legislature, frankly, in the spring with legislation, saying, "We need to impose this. We need to make sure that these are the contract conditions that we're going to put in place regarding our schools." But that didn't happen. No. When a by-election call came forward, almost at the same time we had a Premier talking about the need for legislation to make sure that schools opened at the beginning of the school year.

I point out to you, Speaker—and I had a chance to ask the Premier about this this morning—that this law has not passed. This law is still under debate, and the schools are open today; the children are in those classrooms and the teachers are teaching in them.

Why are we debating today? Why were we debating last week? So that in the riding of Kitchener–Waterloo, Dalton McGuinty and his party could go door to door, saying, "There's a crisis, and we will save you from that crisis." That is the urgency. That is the heart of the

matter. You can't understand the timing, the issue, without being aware of that very real fact.

This Premier decided that he needed a crisis in order to win an election, so parents and their children around this province have been subjected to messages since midsummer that school wouldn't open on time or that school would be disrupted, when, again, the heart of this is the incredible quest—desperation—to secure a majority government for Dalton McGuinty in this province. Students are not being put first. Students, parents and schools are not being put first. They are being used simply as props in a campaign being fought with the hope of securing a majority for Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal Party.

What we're dealing with opens a door on the personality, on the character, of the Premier of this province. Now, we've had a chance to look through that door before. It has come up in debate—the decision of this government twice to make significant decisions around energy investments that had everything to do with saving seats rather than the understanding of this government when it came to what they felt was needed for this province's energy infrastructure.

In Oakville and in Mississauga, decisions were made to shut down contracts for gas-fired power plants. Those decisions were driven by politics, not by analysis of energy need. That opportunism, that willingness to spend public money, to play with public emotion, is something that is becoming more and more apparent to the people of Ontario, and this bill and this approach illustrate it more clearly than just about anything else we've seen.

We have to ask ourselves: Is it ethical, is it moral to frighten parents, to unsettle students by saying that there's a crisis? "Your schools will not open at the beginning of the year." Is it ethical to do that simply for crass political gain? I would argue, and my guess is that parents across this province would agree, that it is not ethical, that it is not moral. But that, Speaker, is what we see.

If this government had felt a greater sense of urgency, this House could have been called back at the beginning of August. This House could have been called back a week earlier than it was called back. Last week, every debate session of every day could have been allocated to this debate and we would have been put in a position where this government could have moved closure then, but it didn't do that. This debate is being stretched out so that this matter is in the public eye right through the last two weeks of the by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo. Don't think any differently.

If you're in Kitchener–Waterloo, if you're anywhere in this province and you're trying to figure out what's going on, if you're concerned that school will be disrupted—because you know that school has started today, and this bill didn't make a difference one way or the other, not one whit of difference—be aware that this is all being driven by that one by-election.

Speaker, if this government truly believed that it was critical to put students first, then it would have ap-

proached many key education decisions in a very different way.

I've talked to students in our schools, in our high schools, who are using textbooks that, as they said to me, are older than they are. If you talk to the people in this province who publish those textbooks, if you look at the government statistics that they provide you with, you can see that it takes 10 to 20 years for a newly approved textbook to get to all students. In science, things move very quickly. A 20-year-old textbook is an interesting antique and can be good to hold down documents in a windy room, but it does not constitute current scientific thinking, even by the government's standards. I've talked to students in science rooms where the only person in the room who has a current textbook is the teacher and everyone else has textbooks that, as I've said, Speaker, are older than they are. Is that putting students first? Is that making sure they have a 21st-century education for the challenges of our times? Absolutely not.

In this, the urgency is driven by political gain on the part of the Premier, not urgency to make sure that students are our highest priority.

Speaker, when I talked about this bill last week, I pointed out again that in a variety of jurisdictions in this province there are caps on the number of students who can be assessed for special-needs problems, even if teachers are very certain that those students need the assessment and need the help. There are caps as a way of containing the expense on those students. What that means for those young people is, they're simply abandoned, set aside. Their pressing needs are not attended to. That means they will live much harder lives.

My colleague the member from Timmins–James Bay will speak in a minute, but I want to say that this is one of the more cynical pieces of legislation that we've dealt with in our time in this Legislature. It is an extraordinary document that I hope will be the source of the downfall for this government.

1600

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I'd like to begin with a recounting of a little conversation I had yesterday while I was out assisting a colleague of mine who is engaged in a little enterprise that needs some people to go door to door in the municipalities of Kitchener and Waterloo. I got to a house, and the lady answered the door. We had a few pleasantries. She said, "You know, I'm a teacher." I said, "Okay, talk to me." We had a very cordial conversation for several minutes. I personally liked the outcome of the conversation, but at the end of it, she said, "Tomorrow I'm going back into my class. Tomorrow I'm going to face my students, and what I'd really like to see tomorrow is, let's just get on with it."

Today we're talking about a time allocation motion in support of Bill 115, which is called the Putting Students First Act—because that, of course, was what she wanted to do—and it's time to just get on with it. We're going to get on with it because today is the first day of school.

We'll get on with it because children all over Ontario, when they woke up this morning, had their outfits picked out, and their moms had their lunches packed, and they're all meeting their new teachers. They are renewing their acquaintances and they are making new friends.

Now, this legislation, if passed, will give students and families the certainty that they need that school will continue uninterrupted. We know we need that because teacher and support staff contracts all expired on August 31. No one was surprised by that. We began the discussions with the various partners way back when the weather was still cold and the snow was still on the ground—what little snow we had. The province worked with many of our partners for almost six months to establish a new, sustainable education funding framework.

In July, Ontario signed an agreement with OECTA, which is the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. This agreement represents a road map that balances the need for this province to reach its fiscal targets while protecting Ontario's investments in full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes, and a superior classroom experience. That agreement is reflected in the Putting Students First Act. It's a fair and a balanced approach. It's going to benefit Ontario's youngest teachers. It will help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

Teachers at more than half of Ontario boards now have signed agreements with the province. Now we need to do our part. Now we need to get on with it, to get the rest of the teacher federations and boards to just do their part.

Partners like OECTA, partners like the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, or AEFO, and the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel engaged in a constructive dialogue and, after a lengthy period of time at the bargaining table, signed agreements that served the best interests not merely of the province, but also of their members. And just last week, education assistants also signed on to this particular contractual road map. Some 3,000 education assistants from the Halton District Educational Assistants Association, the Dufferin-Peel Educational Resource Workers' Association, the Educational Assistants Association of the Waterloo Region District School Board, and support staff represented by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens all signed this agreement, which meets the province's fiscal targets while protecting the classroom experience and also the gains that we have made together in education.

The proposed Putting Students First Act recognizes that these are challenging economic times. The proposed legislation also acknowledges that we've accomplished so much in education since this government came to office in 2003 and we cannot put those gains at risk.

The bill, which is based on more than 300 hours of negotiating with the English Catholic teachers' association, provides for some of the following: 0% salary increases in 2012-13 and 2013-14; and a 0.5% pay cut in the form of one unpaid professional development day in

the second year of the contract so that younger, lower-paid support staff are able to continue to move through the experience grid. Let's just repeat that for some of the younger teachers: That particular clause allows you to continue to move through the experience grid.

It includes the elimination of the current retirement gratuity for the payment of unused sick days that was responsible for an unfunded \$1.7-billion liability to school boards, and it provides for a restructured short-term sick leave plan that would include up to 10 sick days. This sick leave plan would benefit younger support staff by providing income protection for serious illnesses.

One of the things I've heard as I've been walking in the sunshine out in the Kitchener and Waterloo neighbourhoods is: How many people in the private sector who saw their salary cut and watched their pensions melt away would have liked to have a choice of an option like this? This is going to save the province \$250 million in 2012-13, growing to a savings of \$540 million in 2013-14. In addition, the province would achieve one-time savings of \$1.4 billion with the elimination of banked sick days. This adds up, in aggregate, to more than \$2 billion in savings.

In the past, class sizes have had to go up to pay for grid movement for teachers. We don't think that's just. In 2003, only 31% of junior kindergarten to grade 3 classes had 20 students or less. Now, 91% of junior kindergarten to grade 3 classes have 20 students or less. Under the OECTA memorandum of understanding and the Putting Students First Act, we get to preserve these smaller class sizes.

We also get to recognize younger teachers by allowing them to continue to be recognized for their qualifications and for their investment in their career. Partial grid movement will be paid for by all teachers taking that 1.5% pay cut in the form of three unpaid professional development days.

Our government has been a strong supporter of younger teachers. This legislation includes a restructured short-term sick leave plan that would benefit younger teachers. It would include up to 10 sick days and also include up to 120 days for more serious illnesses.

Previously, teachers had to use their sick days for maternity leave or for serious illness. Let's say that again. Previously, teachers had to use their sick days for maternity leave or for serious illnesses. Younger teachers who didn't have banked sick days were simply not supported. The new sick leave plan would support new teachers by providing income protection for serious illness and improved maternity leave provisions.

The agreement also introduces fair hiring practices to the education sector. Many of us, as MPPs, have been visited by our friends and by teachers who have said, "You know, I've completed teachers' college." Maybe they've been on supply teaching or occasional teaching lists for months or even years, and they're not sure of what the process is to be hired on a permanent basis, because that's their goal; they'd like to be full-time, permanent teachers. The memorandum of understanding

sets out fair hiring rules that will bring transparency and accountability for teacher hiring processes and make them consistent all the way across the province. Not one rule in this board, another rule in that board and different rules in another board; consistent across the province.

While management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire, their role comes with a responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood—understood—by all.

We also recognize the impact on young teachers of retired teachers who return as substitutes. We've worked with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. As of this September, retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 days per year, down from 95. This opens up supply days in classrooms for younger professionals, younger teachers; exactly what the younger teachers have asked.

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Speaker, I would urge my colleagues from all parties to work together, because a year ago that's what people asked us to do. They sent us here in this balanced House and said, "You are here to work together. Remember who you're there to help." We're here to work for all Ontarians, and they expect us to work together, so I urge my colleagues from all parties to work together to pass this important piece of legislation as soon as possible.

First and foremost, the Putting Students First Act protects the gains that Ontario has made in education, after the previous government left it in disarray.

The proposed legislation works within the fiscal parameters set out in the 2012 budget. In other words, it keeps our budget deficit going the way it should—down—and it's based on hundreds of hours of collective bargaining. This is what people sent us here to do.

The legislation also provides much-needed support to a very important group of people, and that's younger teachers.

This legislation should pass as soon as possible to give families, to give teachers and to give all Ontarians the certainty that they need. As the teacher I spoke with in Waterloo said to me, it is indeed time to just get on with it.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to comment on the time allocation motion before us today. This motion deals specifically with Bill 115—

Interjection.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Everybody's a little ornery today—the Putting Students First Act, which is, of course, the reason we are all supposed to be here this week and last week.

A little over two weeks ago, the government House leader advised the Speaker that the McGuinty Liberals would recall the Legislature last Monday, on August 27. The government House leader explained that the government had to do this so that it could introduce and pass the Putting Students First Act. In a statement to the press on August 20, the government House leader said, "We're bringing the Legislature back early so that students and

parents have the certainty of knowing that their school year will not be disrupted”—a noble goal, Speaker, to be sure, one that my colleagues and I in the Progressive Conservative caucus agreed with.

The government House leader went on to warn of the rollover of teachers' contracts, arguing that this was why it was imperative to pass the Putting Students First Act as quickly as possible. Again, the House leader said, “In less than two weeks, teachers' contracts will expire and roll over, leading to automatic increases in wages of up to 5.5% and two million more bankable sick days that can be cashed out at retirement. Taxpayers can't afford that,” he said—interesting observation, and once again, the PC caucus and I agree.

In fact, Speaker, it was the Premier and the government that adamantly voted against Bill 92, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector, over three months ago, in May. Bill 92, tabled by the MPP for Elgin–Middlesex–London, would have solved the rollover problem months ago, but no matter.

As our leader, Tim Hudak, said, we in the PC caucus are willing to take half a loaf and allow Bill 115 to pass. Our party committed to Bill 115's passage, because we've been warning the Premier and his government since the last election, almost a full year ago, that a wage freeze was needed to get Ontario's finances under control. Just as importantly, we in the PC caucus agreed with the principle that MPPs should come back to Queen's Park early to ensure that parents and students could enter the school year with certainty and sustainability.

So far, there has been eight hours and 32 minutes of debate on Bill 115, and lo and behold, that dreaded roll-over day, September 1, has come and gone. Of course, today is the first day of school. For all of the government's declarations of providing stability for the start of the school year and avoiding the rollover on September 1, they failed on both fronts.

I suppose, Speaker, the government House leader wasn't far off when he said that legislation moves through a minority Parliament as slow as molasses. Certainly, when it comes to Bill 115, the responsibility for this lack of movement falls squarely on the government. Ultimately, Speaker, eight hours and 32 minutes of debate is long enough on Bill 115. We need to get this bill passed. Let's get it done.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to join the debate on the time allocation motion for Bill 115.

I wanted to talk a little bit about how the grid actually works, because we seem to spend a lot of time talking about collective agreements that roll over, and grids and movement on the grid, and I'm sure it's a little bit like some foreign language to people who are listening. I used to be a school board trustee. I spent 15 years as a school board trustee, so I've spent a lot of time doing collective bargaining.

Teacher salaries are actually based on two things. They're based, first of all, on experience. We have

extraordinarily highly qualified teachers here in Ontario. When a teacher comes in now to the profession, they have two degrees, typically. They have an undergraduate degree, and they have a bachelor of education in addition to that. But depending on the precise nature of their qualifications, they might end up in a different category. The lowest-paid category would be people who have a three-year general degree. The highest of the four categories would be people who have a very specialized honours degree, a four-year degree. Depending on that education, they go in different categories.

One of the things that actually is quite interesting is: Other people envy our teachers. I remember, when I was president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, being at a meeting down in the US, actually, during the Harris years, and people in the US were talking about, “How do we get better-qualified teachers?” Do you know what the advice was? The advice in the States was to come to Ontario faculties of education, where everybody was mad at the government, and hire Ontario teachers, because they were the best-qualified teachers in North America. Anyway, I digress.

Depending on how highly qualified you are, that helps determine your salary. So if you start with the lower end of the qualifications—I'm picking up something here from last year's grid in my own board—about \$46,700 would be the starting salary. If you're at the higher end of qualification, the starting salary is \$53,600.

The other thing that is relevant is your experience. Depending on how many years of experience you have, you step up the grid. If you're at that higher end of experience—again, looking at the grid in my own particular board for one of the groups—you would actually move up to about \$94,600 over a period of about 11 years. It's actually nailed right down in a chart, who moves how much each year, based on qualifications and experience.

What's interesting about collective agreements, and this is universal for teacher collective agreements in Ontario, is that on September 1, your experience is counted. If you're on the grid—that is, you haven't already got enough experience that you're at the top—they roll over, and the teacher rolls up the grid, hence this whole discussion about rolling over and the urgency of making sure that boards aren't trapped in having to pay salary increases.

About 40% of the teachers in Ontario are on the grid. Typically, that increase amounts to, on average, about 5% a year. As of starting teaching today, about 40% of the teachers in Ontario get about a 5% salary increase. That's why it's very urgent that we figure out how to sort this out and get on with passing this bill.

One of the things that, again, not everybody would realize is that the way the grants for student needs—the GSN—work is, in fact, the Ministry of Education actually counts how many teachers are at each level of qualification and how many teachers are at each level of experience, and each board's grants are individualized as to where people are on the grid.

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Here's where things get interesting, because the third party has said on a number of occasions that I've heard that all the teachers have agreed to have a freeze. Their definition is, they've agreed to a freeze of the grid; that is, those numbers I just quoted aren't going to get bigger. It wouldn't stop people from moving up—40% of the teachers—and getting about a 5% salary increase.

When we said “freeze,” we actually meant, “Your compensation is frozen.” A freeze is a salary freeze, which is what I think most of the public anticipated—that a freeze is a salary freeze, because that's what we meant. This year's grants to school boards did not include that calculation of where people are on the grid and the allowance for that 40% of people getting a 5% increase. So the school boards actually don't have the money to pay the salary increases that are required as of September 1. Hence, we need to get this legislation done quickly.

Interjections.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: The people who are nattering away at me over here are absolutely right that there is a problem with the way the legislation works around school board collective bargaining—and you'd have to go back to Bill Davis and Margaret Wilson to figure it out, but it became particularly problematic when school boards lost the right to tax.

School board bargaining, in law, is done between local boards and actually the provincial teachers' union, not legally the local. The government has nothing to do with it. But back when school boards lost their taxation rights, we actually agreed that this is a broken system. What we have done is put in an informal system that says that everybody will come together with the provincial government, figure out a framework agreement and then you're going to have to negotiate the details locally, which worked well as long as the government was negotiating increases. This year when we said that we need to take a pause, we need to hit the pause button, people just said, “Well, if that's what you want, we'll walk away from the provincial discussion.” Therein lies the problem. That's why we're here. We need to get on with the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for—I want to say “Cornwall,” but that's not—

Mr. Steve Clark: Stormont–Dundas.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Stormont–Dundas–Glengarry; thank you.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I commend our education critic from Nepean–Carleton, who has spent hours and hours trying to get to the bottom of it and trying to provide some advice to a government that is refusing to listen to the opposition or the people in the province.

It's interesting to see the urgency of this bill. My wife, Margie, and my daughter, Chelsea, are both in the classroom today, so I've been somewhat involved over the last few months in a lot of discussion and, as you can imagine, over the last eight years in the teaching industry. At no time have I ever heard from them or their unions in

the last few weeks that they weren't going to be back in the classroom today.

I'm just wondering where this crisis is coming from. Is this just another made-up crisis to give the impression of somebody that has finally gotten tough and is going to deal with some of the problems in this province? It just so happens to be timed with two by-elections that are coming up in Kitchener–Waterloo and in Vaughan. It's just an interesting observation, that you really wonder about a Premier that seems to be trying to pick a loser and, all of a sudden, trying to beat them up, when he has actually had such a problem over the last nine years: He's doubled our debt, ran away with our deficit, which has really caused this problem. That's what's upsetting my family at home: the fact that they're being played for the villains in this group.

I seem to remember a year ago a Premier that was bragging about a contract that they were able to put in place “a fair contract,” I think were the words. All of a sudden, this contract is the worst thing that could have ever come in place for the province of Ontario. I just wonder: Contracts usually take two parties to sign, and one of the parties is now pointing fingers at the other. And it's interesting that with over 4,000 public sector contracts, why are we picking on one? Just recently, the power workers of the province received a 3% increase, such a serious financial problem that we didn't have to address it there. We also had bonuses given out to 98% of public service managers and executives. It's funny that there wasn't a problem when that happened. This government is not interested in it. So is attacking the teachers really solving the problem?

There was never any indication that they weren't going back to work come today, and I guess we can see from the news articles and talking to my constituents that it was not a problem and in fact they are there, just as everybody knew they would be. It's the reason my leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for an across-the-board wage freeze, something that really addresses the problem. Not picking winners and losers; it's addressing the problem right across the public sector, a group that has benefited with very healthy increases over the last number of years—actually, the last nine years—with this government, as a way, I guess, to somewhat encourage them to possibly contribute to their election campaigns.

But next week I'll be putting forth a motion in this House that will allow this government to get tough. It's a motion that is calling for this across-the-board public wage freeze. What it will do is stop things happening like we've seen in the case of bonuses going to managers. Maybe this government didn't know what was going on. Maybe they were just unaware. Maybe they were asleep at the switch. But this will allow them to put in legislation that will stop that. They no longer have to be watching what's going on. It will happen. I think that's what we need, because obviously there's a severe lack of oversight in this province today, and we need to bring that back.

It's time to make the tough decisions necessary to put Ontario back, and look after some of the issues that the

people of Ontario are really worried about, such as their health care, their pensions, their social safety net and making our province competitive again. Every time we turn around, we hear of another company—businesses—leaving. In my own riding in 2005 and 2006, we lost over 3,000 manufacturing jobs, and that's not a big riding. It's a riding of about 95,000 or 100,000 people. Across the province, that was a huge issue, because it's not competitive in Ontario anymore. And it's little wonder when we look at some of the issues that this government has put together.

It's time also to stop the political spin and the sound-good legislation that's simply designed to put the McGuinty government first before the people of this great province, legislation and actions such as the Green Energy Act, which has made this province's electricity or energy unaffordable. We're not only paying our competitors in this world to take our electricity essentially free; we've made it so our residents and businesses can no longer afford it. It's adding billions of dollars a year to the cost of electricity.

The cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga power plants that this government is refusing to fully disclose—simply seat savers, again putting themselves ahead of the people of Ontario—is estimated to be well over \$2 billion.

Cancellation of the slots at racetracks will result in losing over \$1 billion in revenue a year. When this government has such a spending problem—it's looking at taxing with every chance it gets—why is it closing its eyes to this revenue that it's been using and providing service to the people of Ontario through helping health care and all the services that we really have grown to need? Now we're looking at 60,000 jobs being lost and the pending slaughter of over 12,000 horses. I'm sure that when that hits the news, it will be somebody else's fault; somebody in the industry should have been paying for these horses, even though they've gone bankrupt.

The refusal to get serious in getting to the bottom of Ornge is another example. If they really wanted to fix this system—I heard today that they're talking about delaying the bill. Well, call the bill. But that doesn't address what was wrong. I mean, the only way to find out what was wrong is to get serious and look at it. We shouldn't be worried about what information is going to turn up. That's just another sign of trying to hide what's going on there. We've asked the Premier to show up and actually give some time to the committee. But as we see again, there's no time for things like that. I think it's time that this government get on with the things that the people of Ontario are looking at and are expecting from a government of Ontario that used to be a leader in this country.

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These are just some of the examples we see of this government looking out for itself and not for the people. So let's stop trying to create a new crisis, this new crisis we see where the teachers would not be in school; we'd see students losing time. They've created enough crises

over their eight years. They have lots to address. They don't need a new one. Again, it's another crisis to show that we can get tough against a small group of people, but we can't afford to get tough and make decisions required on the broader sector—the sector that's enjoyed huge increases over the last years where the private sector has not had that same benefit.

No government has ever divided this province as this Liberal government. If you look at the map of Ontario, it really is sad to look at how the ridings are laid out. It's just a showing that this legislation is really geared towards further dividing the province, looking at what an issue they can get to get, finally, power that would allow them to again not address the issues, not have to listen to the people of Ontario.

I think that it's time that we move ahead. We have an agreement here that is such a bad agreement. He's been bragging for years about how he's pulled education together, how he's increased spending. There's not a group in this province that would refuse to take money if you show up and actually offer them more than they're asking for.

I think this government has to sit down, has to start talking and listening to its people, and it's time to make some of the tough decisions and show some leadership.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise today in the Legislature to speak to the reasons this time allocation bill is so important, the time allocation motion debate on Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, 2012.

I want to start by looking at what has happened over the last almost four years. The whole Western world is reeling from the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Our Canadian dollar, in relation to our biggest trading partner, has increased in value by 50%. Our largest trading partner is in terrible economic shape, and they take about 70% of our exports. The last budget clearly showed that Ontario and Canada are in a better economic situation than most of the rest of the Western world, but still the future strength of our province depends on tough decisions we make today.

Ontario has created over half the jobs in Canada since the 2009 low, and we are now above the level of jobs we were before the major recession. Our government has created the necessary conditions for moving forward. We now must deal with the deficit, and our plan takes that down to a balanced budget in 2017-18.

One part of that is to have each of us play our part. As MPPs in this House, our salaries have been frozen for two years and will continue to be frozen for another three years, so we will be doing what is necessary to take a pause on salaries in the public sector. These are difficult times, and we must all come to the aid of our province.

When I was in business for 35 years, as owners of the business we would enjoy the good years, and when times were not as good, we would take less from our business. As a result, I was pleased to maintain our company

strong for 35 years. We employed over 100 people at our peak and grossed over \$14 million a year.

The province is now in a tough position. It is no different today with the province. Teachers have enjoyed good years and they deserve the good contracts that they have negotiated. They have done an excellent job of working with our government and achieving higher achievement rates, higher graduation rates. Over 100,000 more high school kids graduated under our system than would have with the old graduation rates.

Our schools are now the envy of the world. I heard criticism of our schools, but if you're number one, that's pretty good. That's thanks to the teachers and thanks to the policies of our government.

But as I and my fellow owners in business did, teachers must be team players with the rest of Ontarians and come to the table. I know that most teachers want to be team players. No one likes a legislated solution to this impasse, but over 50,000 other teachers have stayed at the table and agreed to do their part.

An automatic contract rollover occurred on September 1, just three days ago. This rollover will increase pay and grant more bankable sick days, at a cost of \$473 million this year.

Our legislation also maintains stability in our schools by preventing any labour disruptions in the next two years. We could have followed the Drummond report and fired 10,000 of our young teachers and 10,000 of our education support workers, and got rid of full-day kindergarten and smaller class sizes, but we decided that our children were too important for that action.

My own grandchild Logan has just finished two years of full-day kindergarten and starts grade 1, while my second grandchild, Keegan, starts full-day kindergarten today. Logan is now bilingual after two years in full-day kindergarten. He loves school. Keegan could not wait for his bus to pick him up this morning to follow in his brother's footsteps.

Our teachers have done a great job of improving their skills, giving us better achievements for our children and making our education results the envy of most of the world. We have great schools and great teachers in Ottawa-Orléans.

No one likes to see legislated settlements, but negotiations started last February and the teachers' union only stayed at the negotiating table one hour. Other unions negotiated, and after 300 hours of tough negotiations, an agreement was reached.

In order to meet the financial objectives of a balanced budget, we need fair, across-the-board treatment with all teachers and all public servants. We must reach agreement with all Ontarians to share equally in bringing our province back to a balanced budget in the next five years. Unfortunately, in order to make sure the pain is equally divided, we have to proceed with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a piece of legislation that's very important.

We're staring down the barrel of a \$411.4-billion debt in a couple of years and a \$30.2-billion deficit in a couple of years. At minimum, this is a bit of a start, although it does fall well short of a goal, as our leader describes. He uses terms like "half loaf." I could throw in "half-baked."

I know I had a meeting with my—I actually talked with both school boards down my way, the public board and the Roman Catholic board, and they have some concerns, most importantly the ever-increasing cost of compensation over the last several years.

We have a government that stalled until the 11th hour. That has left parents with some angst, some uncertainty with respect to what may be happening in the next few weeks. Here we are with time allocation and the effort to ram this through at a time when we're normally not sitting.

But it's a tentative step; it's a step towards a path that we've been encouraging for well over a year, and going on nine years, I should say, Speaker—nine years of essentially a program that handed our education system over to the trade union movement, rather than leaving it in the hands of parents and school boards. None of us wants to derail the school year or let the unions off the hook. We sincerely want to ensure that the kids are in school today, that they remain in school and things carry on, but there are some problems to deal with.

The arrangement with the Roman Catholic union in many ways put a lid on a boiling pot of water. It deals with just one part of the public sector and really avoids any meaningful or structural change that would be required, but it's at least an acknowledgement of the fiscal crisis that is looming.

Now the task is to review the draft legislation carefully. There will be loopholes; for example, we've seen the stark evidence that the government's so-called wage freeze is not really a wage freeze. The third party makes mention of bonuses handed out to 98% of management in the public sector. That seems to be simply for just showing up. So there are some trap doors out there. We'll be vigilant. We'll be looking at this before we pass final judgment, and I think that's very important, especially given some legislation that's clearly being rushed through.

Thank you for the opportunity, Speaker, and I'll defer to the honourable member next.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member from Mississauga-Streetsville—no?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mississauga-Brampton South. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to enter into debate on time allocation on Bill 115. As a former teacher, I fully understand the important role teachers play in the lives of students. Teachers help shape and mould the future of our young learners.

This bill is all about keeping taxpayer dollars in the classroom. That investment in the classroom will rise in value over time, and we will have a highly skilled and competitive workforce in this ever-changing world and in this ever-competing world.

This bill is all about the confidence parents should have that their students will be in the classroom. This summer, I had the opportunity to attend several community events and spoke to many parents, and they expressed their concerns about the reopening of schools, and I fully understand their concern. I'm very proud of the progress our government and teachers have made together, and we do not want to lose it. The only way we can retain that progress is that we hit the pause button together.

And everyone must understand the reality this province is facing: The reality is a \$15-billion deficit, caused by a global recession. We are all in it together, and we all must do our part. If this legislation is passed, we will save \$473 million, and we need that money for programs like full-day kindergarten, expanding home care for our seniors and for our universal health care.

Madam Speaker, it is disappointing that New Democrats have chosen teacher pay hikes, not the students and Ontario families. Whenever they stand in the House, they often talk about Ontario families and children. I fail to understand what made them change that gear. I urge all members of this House to support Bill 115.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Nipissing-Pembroke-Renfrew—Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A great riding no matter what order you put the names in, Speaker. Thank you very much.

Look, we're debating a time allocation motion here this afternoon in the House with respect to Bill 115, and I know my colleague there across the way from Ottawa-Orléans likes to call it—they originally called it the Putting Students First Act or something, but that didn't fly very well. It was just too cute by half, so it is called An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. But he's still thinking of a carbon tax, so he's a little behind the times on the name of the bill.

Anyway, we're going to support this time allocation motion because we agreed to do so and we want to move this legislation as expeditiously as possible. But something that irks me, and I know it irks members on this side of the House, is the way that the Premier positioned this, the way that he sold it. Out in the public domain, back in August and earlier than that even, but certainly through the month of August, he said, "We have to pass this new legislation before September 1; otherwise, the contracts are going to have automatic rollover provisions and result in increases of up to 5.5%" Well, we know that that assertion was patently false. We're here on September 4. The bill hasn't been passed. In fact, as I've said to people, there is no way on God's green earth that we're going to show up here on August 27 and have a bill passed in this Legislature by September 1. First of all, you can't debate it the same day that you table it. So the time constraints don't allow for it. In fact, we haven't even completed second reading. We've got a time allocation motion, and that's going to take care of second reading, committee and third reading, and we're looking at a bill that is likely to be passed on September 11.

Why couldn't the Premier just be honest in the first place? Why couldn't he have just told the truth right from the start and said, "We want to pass the bill, but let's not falsely create a crisis and pretend that there's an actual timing issue that says we must pass this legislation by September 1"? Because we know that's not the case or we wouldn't be here debating this time allocation motion on September 4.

It's just as I said about that Liberal principle soup. You just throw in a lot of stuff that's left over in the fridge and you get what you get, and every time you get it it's different, because whatever suits their case, whatever suits their purposes, that's what they'll try to sell you.

I have a question. I'm not pretending to be an expert on negotiating contracts or labour law or anything like this, but where I come from, when a contract expires, it expires, and you work without a contract until such time as a new contract is signed, and then the terms of the new contract are implemented retroactively. So who are the geniuses that negotiated a contract that would roll over automatically after it expired?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But retroactivity is not always automatic in the agreement.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's part of the negotiations.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, but they're not all retroactive.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Fine. I know you're going to have a chance to speak, and you can respond to it.

What I'm saying is, where does this automatic rollover come from? If on August 31 contracts expired, that's what they should have done. Who negotiated those agreements in the first place that would have automatic rollover provisions, knowing full well that you weren't going to have a new contract negotiated before August 31?

In every other sector, you would work without an agreement until such time as a new agreement was signed, and then you would negotiate as to when those terms came into effect.

So it was a pretty poor job, the negotiations that went on in 2008. They were actually the genesis of the mess, because that created the mess that you have here today, again another one of your own creating.

It brings us back to the crux of the matter, and that is the manufacturing of a crisis to try to what? Was it because we had a problem? There was a concern that we weren't going to have kids at school on September 4?

Mr. John O'Toole: The by-election.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The by-election. My friend from Durham is tuned right in. He knows exactly what's coming next. What did Premier McGuinty base his call on, the recall of the Legislature? The fact that he had these two by-elections. Conveniently, his good friend Greg Sorbara stepped down in Vaughan just to assist with having two by-elections on the same day. Now he's running the Liberal campaign full-time, which he was only doing part-time before, I guess. Those are the things that people are going to remember. They're going to ask themselves this question.

Dalton McGuinty travelled around Ontario in the last half of the summer having photo ops in empty schools. Every second day he'd have a press release going out: "Dalton McGuinty will tour school A and school B." He got to Z, and then he got to AA. He just wanted to be seen around schools, because the education Premier was going to make sure that everyone knew that he was touring the schools. Who was he talking to? The janitor getting the place ready? All summer long he was visiting schools. I wonder what was going on there. All he was doing was setting the table to go out talking about this by-election now.

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Now he's portraying himself as the tough guy. The gunslinger is back in town. There's a new sheriff in town, and his name is Dalton McGuinty, "And you folks over there, you're gonna to take what I give ya, or I'm gonna make you take it. If you don't take it, we're gonna force it on you. We'll pass the bills."

This week he's talking, "I want the rest of the public sector to know that I'm coming after them." That's Dalton's tough talk because, you see, he hasn't got the message out quite the way he wants it in KW yet. He wants everybody to think that now he's going to be the deficit slayer. Well, I'll tell you what: He is certainly the deficit creator because he has taken this province into record levels of deficit. He has taken this province into record levels of debt, and as Don Drummond, his handpicked economic advisor says, if something isn't done to turn this big ship around, by 2018 we're going to be looking at a deficit of \$30 billion and we will be looking at a debt of \$411 billion, I believe it is—\$411 billion.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's 4-1-1. I'll tell you, somebody better call 911 because this government has put an emergency on this province, and nobody's paying attention. There's no accountability—no accountability whatsoever. I just hear today that—and nobody talks about it—they used to have a dedicated arm of the OPP to follow the health sector, to watch out to ensure that accountability was being followed.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And McGuinty got rid of them—got rid of them.

Interjection: Shame.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And what did we get after that? We got eHealth. We got Ornge. What's next?

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Unbelievable. George Smitherman and Dalton McGuinty said, "We don't need them. We can look after our own accountability." Unbelievable.

Folks, I'm going to tell you that we're going to do what we have to do. We're going to do the right thing. We've said from the start. Our leader, Tim Hudak, when this bill was tabled, said we're going to support it. We're going to support it because we need to recognize that, for the first time, Dalton McGuinty is getting the message just a little wee bit. He's talking tough now. Well, I can

tell you, since last November our leader, Tim Hudak, has been telling him that if you want to get Ontario's fiscal house in order, if you want to turn this mess around, you've got to start with a public sector wage freeze, an across-the-board public sector wage freeze, not collective agreement by collective agreement. There's 4,000 of them in existence in Ontario. You're dealing with a couple here with the education sector. How long will it be before you get it all done? You can't live in a dream world like that and think that you're going to go through every collective agreement and decide that now you're going to start to implement wage restraint.

You talk about fairness. You talk about equality. That is the right thing to do, so that everybody who is fortunate enough—and I'm proud of the public service we have in Ontario. But let's not kid ourselves, they also have a very good job, and those jobs are secure. Those jobs are well-paying, and they're secure. In times of restraint, and in times when the province is facing a fiscal Armageddon, those people also have to share in the shouldering of that burden, and what's been happening here under Dalton McGuinty in the last nine years, it's just been, "Raid the fridge, folks. There's lots of it here. Take whatever you need because we've got more coming because we've got the taxpayers of Ontario behind us, and we're just going to get more."

Well, those days are gone. Those days are gone, and now we've got to actually start to exercise the kind of restraint that Tim Hudak has been talking about. If you go back to the Hansard in this House, from 2008, when the recessions hit, and then in the 2010 budget, when we looked at what you people were doing as part of your so-called austerity package, it was a bloody joke. Our leader was talking about it then, how you people had to face the reality of what's happening in Ontario. So now, finally, we've got them to the point where they're actually beginning to do something. That is why we're going to support Bill 115, which will implement a wage freeze on Ontario's teachers. I'll say it's a quasi-wage freeze, because they're still allowing people to move up the grid. So only about 60% of the teachers are going to have a wage freeze, and about 40% of the teachers are actually still going to have the ability to move up the grid.

The other thing I like about what we forced on them, kicking and screaming as usual, is that we're now going to make sure that the principals get to make the decision about who gets hired on as a supply teacher—not the unions, which are too powerful by half already, but the principals, who know best what the needs of their school are, the needs of those students and the quality of the people they are looking at as far as implementing the teaching decisions in that school.

We will support it. There's a lot more work to be done. But stop playing games just for the sake of by-elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say, I'm not happy participating in yet another time allocation debate. I

expected last fall, when the Legislature was recalled by way of the election—I shouldn't say "recalled"; as a result of the last election in October of last year—that while the minority Parliament lasted, it was highly unlikely, if not impossible, I thought, that we would actually see time allocation brought forward without the will of the three parties. We've agreed to move forward on legislation together by way of programming motions, and we did so under the bullying bill, but it was a question where the three parties agreed. It was a unanimous consent motion to allow certain business of the House to go forward, and I think that's fair. But I never thought—je n'ai jamais pensé pour deux secondes qu'il pourrait y avoir la possibilité de voir le bâillon amené à cette législature.

Interjection.

M. Gilles Bisson: Je parle français, puis tu peux écouter à travers les traducteurs. M^{me} Meilleur me comprend, je le sais bien. Elle est mon amie. Mais je n'ai jamais cru pour deux secondes qu'on se trouverait dans un gouvernement minoritaire avec un bâillon. C'est quelque chose qui était incroyable, parce que, d'habitude, l'opposition n'est jamais d'accord avec le bâillon. J'ai trouvé ça très difficile à accepter, que les conservateurs tout à coup ont décidé de revenir à leur ancienne pratique d'avoir un bâillon quand ça vient à tous les projets de loi.

We remember, those of us who served here in the time of the Harris-Eves regime, that there was not a piece of legislation that came through this House without time allocation. A bill was introduced, a time allocation motion—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And I hear my Conservative friends remind me just how well it worked. Maybe from the government perspective it did, but every bill that came before the House from the Conservatives was brought forward by way of time allocation, and I think that's rather sad.

Is there a want on the part of majority governments to use time allocation? Absolutely. I would suspect that governments that are in a majority in all three parties would at times use time allocation if they felt that the opposition was being extremely unhelpful in being able to get the government to pass its business. But there is a threshold. To find ourselves, in barely—we got through seven and a half hours of debate, roughly, maybe eight hours of debate. To force time allocation on this bill I think is rather unfortunate. I think a government in a majority should always be tempered when using time allocation, even in majority. It should allow the opposition to have some time to be able to debate and some time in committee to be able to have hearings on a bill and to do proper work when it comes to clause-by-clause.

Time allocation tends to rush a bill through, and doing so often makes for very bad legislation. I remember, for example, under Mr. Harris, the changes to the Planning Act. They did a change to the Planning Act. The opposition at the time, being myself and the Liberals,

said, "You've got flaws in this bill. If you're trying to do the following things with the Planning Act, the way that you've drafted it ain't gonna work." We brought five pieces of legislation to the House in order to fix that original bill. Why? Because it was time-allocated and there wasn't enough time given to the bill to have proper debate, proper hearings and proper clause-by-clause.

To find my Conservative friends in support of time allocation at this point, I just have a bit of a problem with it. I understand why they want to do it. They, like the Liberals, believe that you should have a wage freeze in Ontario. They, like the Liberals, believe that there shouldn't be free collective bargaining, that the only way to resolve these things is by coming down with the hammer. I understand the Liberals and Conservatives want to do that. But I think it's rather unfortunate that the opposition, in this case the Conservatives, has decided to support the government when it comes to time allocation.

God, we're only 17 members in the NDP. Even if we wanted to—and I'm not saying we were going to—we couldn't have held it up for very long. We were down to 10-minute speeches at second reading. So even if New Democrats en masse decided that we were going to marshal in all of our troops, we couldn't have held up the debate for another day. So what was the point of time allocation? Because the government says there's a crisis.

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Ah, now we're getting to the central part of the debate. The government said, "Ah, there's a crisis in education, and if we don't get this legislation passed by September 1 there's going to be disruption in the classroom. There are going to be strikes. The teachers are going to be walking the picket line." What's the date today? September 4. Oh, the legislation hasn't passed. Did the schools open this morning?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, they did.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, the schools opened this morning? Were the teachers there? Did the students all show up? Were they all happy? I know my grandson, Nathaniel—it was his first day of school today. Nathaniel—at Louis-Rhéaume—isn't excited about going to school today, but the best thing he'll ever do in all his life is go to school and get a good education in the public system.

There was no crisis. The teachers had said at the beginning of the process, "We're prepared to give you a two-year wage freeze." What part of English don't you understand? A two-year wage freeze offered by the unions—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did they say that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, they did. They put that out right at the beginning. They said, "We are prepared to accept a two-year wage freeze," and the government went, "I didn't hear that. Oh, heck no. Because if I hear that, I can't create a crisis in education to allow me to have a ballot question in the by-elections."

So then the government said, "Oh, yeah? Well, maybe they're talking about a two-year wage freeze but they're all going to be on strike September 1." And OSSTF came

back and said, “Tell you what: We’re not going to have any strike votes. We’re calling them all back,” because they wanted to do the tough work that has to be done, which is to sit down with their employers—being the school boards and the province—to come to some agreement that makes some sense to both parties.

We all understand that negotiation isn’t easy, right? If I’m the employer and you’re the workers, we have a different set of objectives at the table. I want to give less and you want to have more, and we understand that; that’s fair. Employers are trying to save money, and workers and their representatives—the unions—are trying to get a better deal for their members. So, yes, it is hard; it is difficult. I’ve negotiated both sides of the table. I’ve been a union negotiator and I’ve been a management negotiator, and I can tell you, it’s equally difficult on both sides of the table. It is not easy. But I’m telling you, the only way that you resolve these things is by being at the table.

Now, let’s take a look at what’s happening here. The government is saying, “Oh, we don’t want to go through this pesky process of negotiation because we need to have a crisis to have a ballot question in the upcoming election.” What private sector employer has this right to legislate a contract onto their employers? And God, I’m not suggesting for a second we should—maybe my Conservative friends do, maybe my Liberal friends do, but I would never argue that. There’s a double standard here.

If I’m Xstrata or I’m Air Canada or whoever you might be, and you have to sit down as a private company and negotiate with your employees—well, I shouldn’t say Air Canada because they’re federally regulated, but for sure the mining sector, the forestry sector, the service centres and others have to sit down and go through the process. No employer has the right to say, “Well, you know what? I don’t like this. I’m going to legislate an agreement, and it’s going to be what you’re going to have to accept.” Nobody has that right. Why does the government take that right? And why would we, as legislators, take part in giving that right? It’s kind of silly, in my mind. Why? Because it is not about negotiations; it is not about getting an agreement by September 1. This is all about by-elections.

The government decided, “You know what? If we go into the by-elections in Vaughan and in Waterloo, what are the people going to talk about when it comes to the campaign?” People are going to talk about Ornge, the scandal that cost Ontario millions and hundreds of millions of dollars of spent money that shouldn’t have been spent because of the scandal at Ornge. They were going to talk about eHealth—again, millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars that were squandered—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Billions.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Billions of dollars—I stand corrected—that were squandered on eHealth. They were going to talk about the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, where one of those cancellations to date has cost us \$180 million because—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It’s \$190 million.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It’s \$190 million—\$187 million, to be correct—in order to try to save a few seats in the Mississaugas, that was going to be the issue. And Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal strategists said, “Oh, my God, we’ve got to change the channel. How do we change the channel? We’ve got to find some way so they don’t talk about these things.” Because if they talk about Ornge and they talk about eHealth and they talk about Oakville and they talk about 13,000 horses being killed because of what’s going on in the horse racing industry, or any other issue, they’re not going to have a very good chance in those by-elections.

So they said, “Let’s change the subject. Let’s create a crisis in education.” So what they did, they went out and decided to game the system in such a way—and this is what Liberals are so good at: self-interest. What’s good for the Liberal Party is good for everybody. They talk about Liberal values. Thank God we rejected those values federally. The Liberals are down to 21% in the polls and are probably not going to do too well in the next federal election because of some of the Liberal values that got them into Gomery and a whole bunch of other issues.

The truth is that the government has decided to game the system. Why? Because they couldn’t afford to have an election on the issues that are actually the issues of the day. So they said, “Let’s have an education crisis. That way, when we have an education crisis, we can say to people, ‘Your kids aren’t going to be going to school come September 1. There’s going to be disruption in the classroom, and the teachers are going to be on strike.’ We can stand up as Liberals and say, ‘We’re with you, the parents and the kids. We want to maintain the classroom, and we’re going to bring a solution to this problem that shows how tough we can be with teachers.’”

Madam Speaker, what happened on the road to Damascus? The Liberals, I thought, were the friends of the teachers. My God. Do you remember two elections ago? People were so mad at Mike Harris and Ernie Eves at the time because of the things that happened in education. They went out and formed these coalitions with the teachers. They were going to be the friends of the teachers and together they worked hand in hand to defeat the Mike Harris government. On becoming Premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty was the education Premier, and he walked hand in hand, in solidarity, with the big union bosses. He was with the big unions back then. Well, jeez, what happened, Madam Speaker?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, they still are. You have a funny way of showing it, let me tell you. That was funny.

The point I make is, when it was to their advantage politically to be able to woo teachers to win an election, the Liberals did what was good for the Liberals. They didn’t necessarily do what was good for the teachers, the kids, the ratepayers or the school board trustees. They did what was good for the Liberals. They went out there and they chastised the Conservatives.

I agree with some of the stuff they said about the Tories.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Hey, listen, your education record wasn't exactly stellar, my friend. I was here. I remember. But I want to keep my attack over there. So don't get me going, or else I'm going to move it over here again.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So I just say, the government—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Now I've got the Liberals wanting me to go after the Tories again. But you know what? There's very little difference. Tweedledee, Tweedledumber. You're all the same on this one.

I would just say that it was clear that the government really had a strategy by which it tried to deal with the by-elections. They decided that, all of a sudden, they no longer were friends of teachers, they were no longer friends of the big union bosses, as they had been going out and talking against big union—can you imagine Liberals running around the province and speaking in language against—and they used the words “big union bosses.”

They're stealing the Conservative language. What is this world coming to? I would be worried if I were Conservative. Could it be they're trying to get some right-wing votes?

Then they're whacking teachers. I've listened to the Minister of Education, I've listened to the Minister of Finance, I've listened to the government House leader, I've listened to the Premier attack teachers at every opportunity early on in this debate and even to now, because it was politically expedient for Liberals to do so. Why? Because there are by-elections. It's all about, “How can I game the system for the benefit of the Liberal Party?” With Liberals, it's never about doing what's right.

I want to be quite honest, Madam Speaker. Every political party wants to get to government, and once you're in government, you want to stay there. So, of course, New Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives will say things—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's where I'm going—say things in order to advance their chances to get to government or to stay there. But you've got to have some basic principles.

I understand the Conservatives. I don't agree with them, but I respect them. They say they believe in a wage freeze, period. They believe that workers shouldn't get a raise for the next couple of years. The way to balance the budget, say the Conservatives, is austerity and a wage freeze. I don't agree with them, but, God bless, at least they're being true to their principles.

The Liberals, at one point, used to talk like New Democrats, and now they sound like Conservatives in a hurry. They're out there trying to out-right-wing the Conservative Party that is the right-wing party of Ontario. They're now using language that you would never have

thought a year ago. Imagine a year ago, before the last election, if somebody were to propose that the Liberals were going to come out and attack the the teachers sometime in the future, within 12 months—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Or big union bosses.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: Or big union bosses. You would have never thought that was possible, because didn't they have—what was it called? The family coalition?

Interjection: Working Families Coalition.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Working Families Coalition, and they got together with everybody in order to be able to do what was right for the Liberal Party—not about their principles about supporting working people, not about making sure that we have a sustainable system of education that provides the best education for our kids in a way that makes some sense to the taxpayer. It was all about Liberals gaming the system for themselves, because Liberals are self-serving. We've seen it in Ottawa: Gomery and everything else. We've seen it in Ontario: eHealth, Ornge, Oakville, Mississauga. We've seen them all. But that's what the Liberals love to do.

Now they're in a by-election and people will say, “Oh, no, no.” I heard some members on the government side say, “Listen, we had nothing to do with the creation of the by-election in Waterloo.” I heard that last Thursday.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And he's actually admitting he didn't.

They offered the Tory member of the riding, Liz Witmer, a job at the Workers' Compensation Board in exchange for resigning her seat so they could have a by-election.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Did we force that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And the government is still at this day saying, “Did we force that?” My God, if you didn't want her to resign, you wouldn't have made the offer. It's pretty simple to me.

My point is that the government, again, does things for their own reasons. They offered Elizabeth Witmer, a person whom I have great respect for, who was elected in 1990 along with myself, the same year—and I dealt with her as an opposition member and as a minister of the crown. I had great, great respect for her. I don't agree with her politics—her politics, I'll leave that aside—but she was essentially a person who tried to do her job. What the Liberals did is that they gamed it and made her an offer that she couldn't refuse, and she decided to leave at the offer of the Liberals. Again, what was that all about? It was about Liberals doing what's right for Liberals.

Was it because they wanted to have a stellar chair at the Workers' Compensation Board? Hey, there are all kinds of people who could have filled that job. I know for a fact that there are members and former members of the assembly who would have loved to have that job, former members who had not run in the last election. And I won't use names, but I know a number of Liberals who did, and there were other people who could have done the

job. No, they gave it to her because they wanted to create a by-election in order to be able to get a majority in this House, and then they said, "Okay. Now that we've got her out, the next part of the strategy is, we need to create a crisis," and they decided to create the crisis around education.

So they're in an election now. I can't show you this, Mrs. Speaker, because it would be a prop if I held it up like that or I held it up like that, so I'll leave it down. I can't hold it up, because if I did that, it would be a prop. So I'll put it back down again, and I will just say—this is interesting—the Liberals who say they're not gaming this for the by-election, read the headline on the latest flyer to go out by the Liberal Party in Kitchener–Waterloo: "Teacher Unions are Preparing to Strike." Holy jeez, what happened this morning? The schools opened. The teachers said, "We're not going on strike." The teachers said, "We're prepared to give you a two-year wage freeze."

The Liberals are now bashing the teachers and bashing their union friends—because why? There's maybe a chance of winning a by-election. I will predict they will not win Kitchener–Waterloo. I ultimately always believe in the public. The public, at the end of the day, sees through these kinds of things. I just think it's a pretty cynical move on the part of the government to try to make it an election issue strictly for their own political gain. So I say it's rather, rather sad.

The other thing I want to speak to very quickly—and I've only got about 10 minutes left, but I need to make this point. Mr. Hudak, about last spring sometime, suggested—as he is today; he's been true to his word all the way through, so I understand this is the Conservative position, and I don't mean this to attack Tories. He believes the way you balance a budget is to force a wage freeze on all public sector employees, broader public and direct to the OPS; all right? That's the position that the Conservatives—well, the Liberals now took, but that was the position that the Conservatives took. Now, I disagree. I think we need to moderate our wage demands. I think we need to negotiate frugal collective agreements with our employees—I don't disagree—but I believe there are other things like revenue generation from creating a stronger economy that would allow you to build an economy with the revenue. But that's another story.

The point is, the Conservatives and the leader of the Conservative Party raised this issue back last spring. And when he raised the issue with the Premier of the day, he said, "Mr. Premier, you must do a wage freeze. You must do a wage freeze for two years." And what did the Premier say?

Mr. John Yakabuski: "Can't do it."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: "Can't do it. It's against the law. It'll be challenged in the courts. Didn't you see British Columbia?" And then he cited the British Columbia court challenges that came out of the Liberal government in British Columbia who froze public sector wages and chose not to negotiate. It went to the Supreme Court of Canada and it was overturned.

The Liberal Premier, the Liberal Minister of Education and the Liberal finance minister and others for months were saying it was unconstitutional to do this, and they actually laughed at the Conservatives. They were laughing at them. They were saying, "Oh, there they go with dumb ideas. There go the Conservatives: same old same old. This is not the way to do it. There are better ways of being able to do it."

All of a sudden, Tim Hudak came in and woke up, I guess, Mr. McGuinty, or maybe Mr. McGuinty was already there all along, I would argue, probably. And all of a sudden the Liberals have flipped their position and they're now saying wage freezes are the only way to go, and legislated wage freezes.

Interjection: Wow.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Wow. I have to say, man, that road to Damascus is a really short one, because it wasn't all that long ago that my good friend the Premier of Ontario was actually opposed to the idea because he thought it was unconstitutional. Now he says it's his idea.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So he fell off his horse on the road to Damascus and now he wants to kill the horse.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He fell off his horse on the way to Woodbine. That's a whole other story.

That was funny. That was a good heckle. I enjoyed that.

But anyway, I just say the Premier changed his mind and all of a sudden said, "Oh, no. Now it's our idea." So now you've got this kind of squabble going on between the Tories and the Conservatives where they're out in the middle sword-fighting, saying, "My idea." "No, my idea." "My idea." "No, my idea." "No, no, my idea." Andrea Horwath is looking at both of them, going, "Boy, you guys look silly."

I've got to say, what happened? All of a sudden you guys are fighting to see whose idea it was. Well, I'm going to score it. It was a Conservative idea. All right? It was clear. The Conservatives last spring put the idea forward, and the Conservatives were true to their word. The Liberals stole the Tory idea because it was, in their mind, expedient for the by-elections to be able to do it.

I've got to say to my Conservative friends, I don't know if I'd be happy or sad that Mr. McGuinty agrees with you, and I have some experience. All right? I'm not too sure, because they're not very popular on the other side there. You probably know and see the polls. They're running third.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know they're not popular in my riding.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're not popular in my riding either—not popular in a whole bunch of ridings.

I would say, I feel for my Conservative friends, because when Liberals start to steal Conservative ideas—I won't say the next line. I'll try to be nice and not be too mean to my Conservative friends.

I just say, it's pretty clear they did this for a political reason. What's worse is that the civil liberties association and others have come before the cameras across Ontario and have said they are going to take this up in a court

challenge. I think we have to take that rather seriously, and I'm hoping that in the very limited amount of time that we have for committee hearings, we're going to hear from some of those lawyers and have them properly explain their arguments as to why they find this to be unconstitutional and why the courts will strike down this legislation. I think it will be very helpful to hear that.

But what they're saying is, like the British Columbia case, the Liberal government can't say, "Oh, we met the threshold to try to get an agreement." Just because you tried to get an agreement doesn't mean to say you can trump somebody's rights under the Constitution. You know, "I tried not to do something that was against the law," is not an acceptable argument in the courts when trying to defend yourself for having broken the law. The government is trying to make the argument that they somehow have reached a threshold that allows them to break the law. That's unconstitutional. You just can't do that. There's a process established under the law that says, "This is what people can do when it comes to negotiating wages," and it isn't easy. It's a lot of hard work. We all understand that. But that's what you've got to go through.

And the sad part is, this is going to cost taxpayers in the hundreds of millions of dollars. What's really cynical about this is that by the time this goes to court and we get a decision, and let's say the decision overturns—which I think it will, but I'm not the one who can decide that; the courts will have to decide. But if they overturn this decision, they overturn the law, it probably won't even be Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals who will be in government. It will be an NDP government or it will be a Conservative government that will be there to deal with the fallout of this legislation.

1720

I just want to put on the record now—because I believe there's a good chance that Andrea Horwath will be the next Premier of Ontario—that this is one heck of a legacy to leave a future government. This points back to my original point. This is all about the cynicism of Liberals. It's about the Liberals gaming the system for them. I'm sure they got the briefings from the staff at the ministry and the lawyers at legislative counsel who said, "This may not stand up in the courts," and somebody at the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Finance had to tell cabinet—unfortunately, we can't ask for these documents because they're private, but I bet you they exist. They had a conversation at cabinet and said, "Listen, there's a chance that this will be struck down in the courts, and if it is struck down, it's going to cost you X amount of hundreds of millions of dollars." The government decided it was better to make a decision over the short term for their own Liberal fortunes than it was to make a decision for the people of Ontario, and if there's one reason why people should be voting NDP in the next by-elections in Vaughan and Waterloo, it is exactly that.

Do not give the Liberals an opportunity to get a majority in this House. We have seen two majority governments through this government. We have seen two—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: A little panic here.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, we'll see who's panicking on Thursday, my friend.

The point I would make is, this government doesn't need a majority, doesn't deserve a majority and should never be given a majority because, in the end, the Liberal Party is not about making sure things are done properly and correctly for the public; it's all about the Liberals' self-interest, and I think that is really, really sad.

I just want to end on this particular point. The government is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's such a silly thing. You know exactly—anyway, I won't even debate that one.

The other point I want to make, the unfortunate part is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Look at that. Liberals are protesting all of a sudden because they know that, in fact, in their heart of hearts they are self-interested when it comes to power. They will do whatever they can in order to game the system to benefit Liberals and not necessarily the public. So I understand why they're professing.

The last point I want to make is this: The sad part is, we're going to get, essentially, tomorrow morning or—what is it we're getting? We're getting tomorrow afternoon and a little bit of tomorrow evening for public hearings. We're going to get a little bit of time on Thursday morning for public hearings on a bill that is pretty controversial, we can all agree, and has got questions of constitutionality. I think that's rather sad.

Again, I want to end where I started. When you rush legislation through this House and through the committee process, it makes for very bad legislation. The government had already admitted at the government House leaders' meetings that they weren't in a rush to get this legislation, that it wasn't retroactive, that if they got the bill sometime in early September or mid-September, that would be fine. But instead, because of the by-elections, they had to do what they're doing now to game it for the Liberal fortunes, because it's all about Liberals; right? It's not about the people. It's always about the Liberals.

The point is, we are now going to short-shrift the process of committee and we're going to end up with a bill, quite frankly, that is pretty flawed, and I think that's sad. If we've learned anything in this House—and I think the Conservatives and Liberals will agree with me, because we've all seen this from both the government side and the opposition side of the House, at least some of us, that short-shrifting legislative debate, short-shrifting time for public hearings and clause-by-clause makes for very bad legislation. The government could have gotten its way at the end. We could have only held up the debate if we so chose, and we didn't want to do that. But the government, essentially, a day they would have had second reading—and what would it have been for the government to say, "We're going to allow a couple of weeks of hearings, two days one week, two days the next week"? They still would have got their bill.

There are only 17 New Democrats in the House. We can't hold it—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're not going to go on strike. I'm going to make you a \$100 bet now, publicly, that they're not going to be on strike this month. I can guarantee you that, at the very least, which means you have time. If you allowed them to negotiate at the bargaining table, I very much doubt there would be strikes either, because most people out there—I don't care if you're a teacher, you're a cab driver, you're a miner, you're a legislator; we all understand times are tough. Government doesn't have a lot of money. You can't keep on spending money you don't have. At one point, you've got to balance the budget, which means to say you've got to temper your demands, and there's hardly anybody out there who doesn't understand that. It would seem that the government doesn't understand that, or at the very least they're trying to make it look as if they don't understand that so that they can game the system for themselves when it comes to by-elections. And I'd be very surprised if they win that by-election.

Speaker, I want to inform you that we will be voting no on the time allocation—I don't want you to be surprised—and we will be voting no to this legislation because we think this is the wrong way to go. Discussion is always the best way to get the resolution, and you do that by sitting down and doing the hard work that has to be done across the table from each other to get the agreement that's needed to move forward.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to add to the debate on the motion that is in front of us. Let me say that I have been in this House long enough to remember when, on both sides—and I happened to be on the other side once as well—we would be shouting at each other when a motion to cut the debate would be introduced. I think we are at a particular time now where both sides agree that it's time to move on. I think the people out there are telling us it's time to move on.

In the last three or four days, I think I have met people at church, at the coffee shop and in the malls saying, "What's all the big debate going on if you folks have already decided?" Well, we have decided; the bill has been introduced, but it requires a certain process that we have to go through in the House before something is finally approved and it becomes law. They say, "But it doesn't make sense because you have it already and the opposition agrees to go ahead and do it, so why don't you get on with it?"

Saturday I met with some teachers, and they said, "We are professionals"—and we agree with them; our teachers are professional people—"and we understand that we are going through a particular economic time. So if you've got to do it, go ahead and do it."

Now we have the motion in front of us to cut the debate or bring it to a close, if you will, and we are moving that way.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It will still go to committee.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It will still be going to committee, we still have some further public hearings, but it's time to move on.

It was interesting the other day. Coming down, I was listening to one of the talk shows, and our friend Buzz Hargrove was saying in answer to a question, "We have the best education system in the world." I think the opposition knows that; I think the people out there know that. But it's important to recognize how we got to be the best education system in the English-speaking world. I have to take that from the good comments from my good friend from Trinity-Spadina the other day when he said, "You have gained the respect and the love of the teachers and the union over the last eight or nine years. Why would you go and do something now when you did so much for the education system in the past eight or nine years?" That's a good point. How did we get to this particular stage?

We got to this particular stage because, when we won the election in 2003, our Premier, Mr. McGuinty, said, "We have to put enough money in the education system to make this the best education system in the world. We want to have the best-educated workforce," and so we did.

We've come up with a number of improvements to the education system, and that is why we have today the best education system in the world. We still enjoy the smallest class sizes. Our dropout rate is the lowest in history. We have hired 20,000 teachers, and they are still there. We have hired the 10,000 support staff, and they are still there. We have built over 155 new schools, and we are still building.

We have kept our core value to our people of Ontario when it came to education and other programs. I think we are at the stage today where we can say, "Either we maintain those programs or we trash those programs."

What I have seen in the House in the last few days is good. I think it's important. I think we can come together and work and decide and deliver on some important things for the people of Ontario. It is much better when we can do that than tearing people apart. I think it's much better, Speaker.

1730

This is one of those issues where we can go to our professional people, the teachers—and they have all our respect. They are professional because they understand that the economic times demand some action. As of July, some of the boards have said, "Yes, we will accept the demands of the government." We have been at the table since February, I believe, so we had ample time to really, really negotiate. School started today, Speaker. It would have been a wonderful thing if we had all the boards saying, "Okay. Well, it is not what we really wanted, but we're going to go ahead with it." We still have groups that have not said yes. We have given them until the end of the year to come on board. It is not something that we are really shoving down their throat and saying "absolutely." This is the situation.

Interjection: It's time.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Absolutely.

I only want to mention a couple of points from the bill, Madam Speaker, because I haven't got time to go through the entire bill.

If there is one consistent request that comes to my office—and they come even with their parents. They feel maybe they can press the issue more heavily, if you will, on us, on the local members, saying, “Look, it's four years. My daughter cannot get a job.”

I think it's important, Speaker, that we take that into consideration. There is good reason that if we have the retired teachers, instead of giving them *carte blanche* to work as long as they want, 90 days, 150 days a year, we cut them down so we make some room for our young teachers.

Interjection: That's only fair.

Mr. Mario Sergio: If they are professional today, our teachers, Speaker, it is because of what we have given them in the last eight, nine years. We have sunk billions of dollars into the education system to have the best education system. We have so much pressure coming from our neighbours—Asia, European countries—and I think it's important that we provide our young people with the best education system.

When we came to power, we started with early childhood education. We started at that particular time. We have introduced, Speaker—and I think there are more schools now adopting full-day kindergarten. Why is that, Speaker? Because we want to provide them, at an early age, with the best education possible. I think it's important. It's good for the students, it's good for the people, it's working for our labour force and it's good for the economy.

I think we are at a stage where we can say as a House, “Okay. We're at this stage. It's been introduced. We've got to do it. The debate has got to come to an end, but we

still have a couple of days of hearings.” People are welcome, teachers are welcome, unions are welcome to come by and say their piece.

The fact is that we are in a particular economic situation, but I think they do understand that something has to be done. Our Conservative friends understand that something has to be done. Deep down, I believe that even our NDP friends believe that.

I would like to say: Let's not all be one-sided and speak for the teachers' unions. Let's speak for the teachers as well, and let's move with this particular bill that is in front of us. Speaker, I want to thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Milloy has moved government motion number 48. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

I have two deferral slips. They request that this will be done tomorrow; that it be deferred until Wednesday, September 5.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Madam Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? In my opinion, the ayes have it.

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The House adjourned at 1736.

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Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
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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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
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Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

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Ernie Hardeman, Tracy MacCharles
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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