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**Journal
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(Hansard)**

Thursday 21 March 2013

Jeudi 21 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Thursday 21 March 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Jeudi 21 mars 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Good morning, Speaker. On this beautiful second day of spring, when the sun is shining outside, and the day after happiness day, the government is pleased to call government order G11. And let's hope the happiness continues.

**AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT
(AIR AMBULANCES), 2013**

**LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES
(SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)**

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 7, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / *Projet de loi 11, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.*

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

Mr. Rod Jackson: It is a pleasure, on this day after happiness day, to rise and speak with the House—and especially the Attorney General today—on Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, or, as I like to call it, an act to divert attention away from actually fixing anything Ornge and addressing real issues.

Bill 11, when we get down to it really, when we read it, is nothing more than a piece of non-substantive window dressing that this government is so good at putting forward. It will do little, if not nothing, to fix the costly, messy scandal at Ornge. And I can guarantee that we of the opposition will not let this bill or the McGuinty government get off the hook for all the scandals that have plagued this government over the past 10 years, and certainly not Ornge.

The cost of Ornge: Now, when I say it's a costly scandal, and we say it's a costly scandal, I think it's clear. We don't just mean money-wise, through the hundreds of millions of dollars given to Ornge by this government only to be squandered away through ineffective service and questionable financial practices; that speaks for it-

self, really. I mean, we have these wonderful helicopters that don't even serve the purpose for which they were bought. That, in and of itself, is questionable.

But I also mean that the scandal involving Ornge is costly to the well-being and safety of Ontarians. Let's look at the disturbing numbers: Ornge received government funding to secure a land ambulance service to transport a projected 20,000 patients a year, starting in 2008. Instead, the land service transported only about 15% of the projected number—certainly not an overachievement, just in case anyone was wondering—at an average per patient cost that was nearly as high as the cost to transport a patient by air. It was costly financially, but even worse, it was costly to the health and well-being of Ontario's citizens and indeed endangered many people's health. When you endanger one person's health, you're endangering families.

Let's look at some of the other numbers. Ornge borrowed almost \$300 million—\$300 million—primarily to finance the purchase of helicopters and airplanes and its new head office. Even though Ornge's own analysis indicated only nine helicopters and six airplanes were needed, Ornge purchased 12 new helicopters and 10 new planes. Sounds like another example of irresponsible and wasteful spending during a time when this province can ill afford to have such abusive spending.

This wasteful spending on a mismanaged program that was clearly left without real oversight from the ministry responsible for it is made even worse by the amount of debt and deficit it has contributed to. At the end of the day, that's really what we're talking about: money that's coming out of taxpayers' pockets at a time when we can't afford it.

Recently, we saw the MoneySense rating of cities, where a province like Alberta, I think, had five in the top 10 and not one Ontario city in the top 10. That's not right. I think Ottawa was actually in fifth place, but down from first three years in a row. Why is this? Why are we seeing our cities and our province plummet to the bottom? This shouldn't be the case. We used to lead our Confederation; we don't anymore. This scandal is really a great example of what's happening and what's wrong in Ontario today.

Right now, like I said, we're looking at a massive, at least \$12-billion, deficit—maybe \$30 billion if we don't take bold measures to get it stopped. Ontario's debt is on track to double to \$411 billion by the 2017 fiscal year—\$411 billion. That number is something that people can't even comprehend. I can't comprehend it—I don't know what \$411 billion looks like. I don't think anyone here

has ever seen that much money. It's ridiculous. It's so hard to comprehend that it's even hard to get people's attention about it sometimes. It comes at a time when our new Premier has used the word "debt" a grand total of four times in the House in the past 10 years. Since I've been elected, I think I've used it 40 times or more.

Interjection.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Probably more.

With rising debt and deficit, over half a million Ontarians are unemployed. Toronto itself has a 7% or 8% unemployment rate. Each mistake and each scandal this government makes, going back to the OLG scandals, the Ornge scandals, eHealth scandals and gas plant scandals—these aren't little scandals; these are big ones. These are ones that really go to the core of what this government is about, and not one apology, not one action to make it right except for window dressing. That's abominable.

With rising debt and deficit and over half a million Ontarians unemployed, each scandal this government makes is that much more costly. It contributes to the fiscal problems that have already been created, and that's why we need greater change than bills that lack real substance, as this one does.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It takes away from health care and education.

Mr. Rod Jackson: It takes away from health care and education, as the member from Northumberland-Quinte West said.

Even worse, this wasted money adversely affects the safety of Ontario citizens, and that's really the crux of this. We can't forget, when we talk about health care bills or even education bills, what they're really there to do: benefit our citizens, our children, our seniors. Why? Because the helicopters purchased are completely inadequate in allowing paramedics to do their jobs. The organization of Ornge was so convoluted and a wicked web that no one knew what the other arm was doing—what the other 20 arms were doing. You can't even administer CPR in these helicopters. Wouldn't you think that's a primary function, a service you would provide in an ambulance, whether it's an air ambulance or a land ambulance? Maybe it's something that should have been looked at.

People should feel reassured when they are in need of help, when they see a bright orange helicopter of the Ornge fleet, instead of worried about their safety. It should be like an angel coming out of the sky, not something they're concerned about. We've seen tons of dangerous mismanagement throughout the Ornge organization, almost from day one.

0910

What I find equally disturbing is the fact that when it assigned the operation of Ontario's air ambulance services to Ornge, we were all told by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care that there would be proper oversight of Ornge. I think we can all agree almost unanimously in this House that that did not happen. I've got news for you: The buck stops there—right over there.

You actually have oversight when you're in government. That's exactly what the owls and the eagles are in this chamber to remind us of: that you have oversight over your government. You can't put a layer of bureaucracy to protect you. At some point, someone over there has to stand up and be counted and take responsibility for the things that go wrong in this government. You know what? People appreciate that. What they don't appreciate is you trying to run away from your scandals; they'll actually appreciate it if you own up to them. Maybe that's something you should consider.

We were promised standards that would be set and checked to ensure accountability on both the fiscal and patient care levels. Like I said, this obviously didn't happen. Despite the fact that the minister has had the power to appoint a supervisor from the very beginning of the Ornge saga, and despite the fact the minister had the power to intervene at Ornge under the original Ornge performance agreement as well as under the Independent Health Facilities Act, taxpayer money was blatantly wasted and lives were put at risk because somebody over there didn't want to take responsibility for the mess that was at Ornge. Yet you had the power to do it. Why not? An examination of the facts shows there was a clear lack of oversight at Ornge; it led to this mess in the first place.

Just recently it was revealed that Ornge took out a \$10-million life insurance policy on former CEO Chris Mazza. Taxpayers were directly responsible for half a million dollars in footing this bill. The health minister responded by saying she had no idea that this money had been wasted—no idea. It's got to leave you wondering just how much more taxpayer money is being wasted that this ministry is unaware of. This is a huge ministry, I'll grant you that. But if you can't handle it, get out of the kitchen. If you can't handle the heat, get out of the kitchen.

Ornge has been plagued with bloated salaries, such as the \$4.6 million in salaries, loans, bonuses and cash advances that the former CEO took from the company. How do you not notice that? I mean, how does that go under the radar by a government that's supposed to be accountable for these things? It's not a little bit of money; we're talking about a lot of money. They made him, I think, if not the highest-paid civil servant, definitely the highest-paid civil servant in the province, for running an air ambulance service. It's a very important service, but let's talk about value for money. We certainly weren't getting it there.

The news of this waste didn't come to light until it was too late, because of the lack of oversight and the simple irresponsibility of this government to take hold of a problem it created. You can't light a fire and then call yourselves heroes when you come in and put it out. It took so long for this mismanagement to come to light precisely because this government failed to ensure the proper amount of oversight was in place. Not only do they shamelessly spend tax dollars; they often don't stop to make absolutely certain the money is dedicated toward improving the lives of the great people in this province.

I learned a lot of lessons from my dad when I was in business for myself, and one of the main ones he taught me is, “Rod, the one thing to have a successful business”—and I apply this to my own office, and I hope we apply it when we’re government—“is you need to inspect what you expect.” This isn’t getting done over there, and that’s a basic management tenet. If you don’t know that, you can thank me later for letting you know that that’s a great piece of advice for managing your business.

There are tons of examples of scandals like this that are the result of lack of oversight and lack of responsibility and really, in some cases, potential misfeasance of government power. It’s unacceptable, and it is more proof that the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government lacks the organizational and managerial know-how to ensure the well-being of some of Ontario’s most important sectors.

In addition to the Ornge scandal, Ontario also faces the eHealth scandal. Remember that one? And I think if anyone starts talking to some of the bureaucrats in the Ontario civil service right now, you’ll see and hear about a real level of frustration that this project still isn’t off the ground the way it should be. It’s ridiculous the amount of money that’s going into this and not having any results come out of it. By the way, why are we investing in something that we have internal, in-house expertise to do? It doesn’t make any sense. I don’t know how many friends you have over there that are in this company that’s been assigned to get eHealth off the ground, but it’s disgusting.

This mismanagement and scandal in the health care system is equally matched by the mismanagement and scandal plaguing Ontario’s energy sector under this government. The decision to close down power plants in Oakville and Mississauga in order to save a few Liberal seats is costing the Ontario taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars more that they didn’t need to spend. It’s just another example of scandal. This continued mismanagement is leading to the skyrocketing hydro bills that households and local job creators are forced to deal with right now, only adding to the already difficult economic times that everybody is facing. As my respected colleagues have mentioned, we currently have around 500,000 people out of work in this province. With continuing scandals under the management of this Liberal government and with energy prices continuing to rise under this government’s watch, I don’t see any end in sight. Something needs to change, and I’m thinking it’s you guys.

Now, instead of taking responsibility for their mistakes, as I mentioned, and admitting their failings, Liberals seem more concerned with saving face than actually fixing what they broke—say and do whatever you need to keep on winning elections. In fact, the McGuinty-Wynne government is so concerned with their own political well-being that they allowed charges of contempt to be brought against the Minister of Energy before even making the slightest effort to guarantee their own accountability to the public.

This government and its Premier continued to play games with Ontarians by deliberately filing an out-of-order motion to expand the justice committee’s mandate. By filing a motion they knew would be ruled out of order, the government demonstrated it’s more concerned with superficially saving face than it is with being genuinely transparent and accountable. It’s really easy to own up to what you did wrong, and you know what? This scandal would be over like that. It may not be pretty, but it would be over and it wouldn’t linger.

Just recently, many members of the PC caucus stood up for hard-working taxpayers to ask for members of this cabinet to take responsibility for their mess. Instead of taking their responsibility and duty to Ontario seriously, they refused to apologize for their scandals, once again proving that they care less about Ontarians and more about themselves. There’s no shame in apologizing. This is outrageous. What happened to the accountability, the transparency and the honesty that Ontarians expect and rightly deserve from their government and from all of us sitting here? For all the people that we represent, there should be no shame in apologizing for mistakes that we’ve made, and I think, probably, most of you would admit there have been mistakes made.

The theme of a lack of accountability continues with this bill and with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I truly believe that all members, even those across the aisle, can agree that wasted money and inappropriate spending like this has no positive outcomes for Ontarians; not one. I commend the minister for, at the very least, acknowledging that the money spent in outrageous salaries is exactly that: it’s outrageous. But again, like I said, it’s one thing to set the fire, but to call yourself a hero for coming in and putting it out—that’s a whole other story. Yet in the same breath, the minister claims to understand how deep these problems run. She absolves herself of responsibility repeatedly. Repeatedly, she defends her role and insists there was nothing she could have done to stop it.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: She should do the honourable thing.

Mr. Rod Jackson: She should do the honourable thing—but in failing to recognize these problems earlier, this is exactly her problem. The minister should be familiar with everything in her ministry, especially when we get up into the hundreds of millions of dollars. And not admitting clear fault for the depth of scope of this scandal is another example of how this government refuses to be held accountable for any of their actions. That, I find appalling and disappointing, frankly. Instead, we get just another attempt to superficially tape over a problem that they created. Just like filing an out-of-order motion or shuffling cabinet, or just like trying to apply a fresh coat of paint to a broken government, this bill offers no real solutions. The problems this province is facing—and it’s a shame that this government refuses to even acknowledge their own mistakes.

0920

Beyond the fact that Bill 11 does not actually get to the bottom of the serious problems that we can all agree

are happening at Ornge, it also fails on a whole raft of other levels. The single biggest failure is the so-called whistle-blower protection section, which actually does little to protect the whistle-blower. By failing to provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers and by imposing limits to individual protection and on who they can approach with information, the whistle-blower protection section really does nothing at all.

Without clarifying who a whistle-blower can resort to, this government has tried the equivalent of sealing a leaky pipe with scotch tape. In section 7.7, relating to whistle-blowers, Bill 11 only implies protection will be given to whistle-blowers who come forward to the ministry itself—that's like the wolves guarding the gate—or inspectors, investigators or special investigators. I wonder what this means for anyone who might wish to talk to the media, since the media are not dealt with in this act at all. Instead of granting whistle-blowers important protections across the board, it limits their ability to come forward in the first place. That's not my idea of fixing a problem. It's a mismanaged attempt that clearly won't work if it's applied today. You know what? Maybe that's a mistake or an oversight, and maybe that's something that the minister can take back.

Brave individuals with information regarding mismanagement and incompetence in government-sponsored programs need to feel safe to come forward and share everything they know. That's how our government is going to work best. That's how the system that serves the people who elected us and put us here will be served best. In my own riding, in Barrie, I know of an employee at Ornge who wants to come forward. He won't come forward because he knows his job is in jeopardy. We've already seen at least one person lose their job over their exposure of what's happening at Ornge.

How long will the status quo be allowed to continue before important changes are made—real changes, substantive changes? This bill does not achieve an appropriate level of protection. Safety is impossible with this sham Liberal bill. Instead of letting potential whistle-blowers know they're valued, it tells them that maybe they'd better not bother, because their government can't put together a functioning whistle-blower protection program.

This bill also fails to provide an appropriate level of oversight. I can't deny that it tries to do so by making provisions for the possibility of provincial representation on the board and by giving the minister power to issue directives, but nowhere in the act do I see an assurance that money will be monitored closely. And nowhere do I see assurance that the boards of directors and future CEOs will have their salaries publicly reported and recorded.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's the same old, same old.

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's the same old, same old.

It's high time that the Liberals learn that you can't just throw money at a problem to make it go away. It's the type of thinking that has brought this province into this giant massive debt. It's also time that Liberals learn that

Ontarians will not stand for non-substantive legislation designed to try to divert attention away from the rotten cores of many of the scandals—which have become characteristic of this government. We've wasted enough time and enough money on these irresponsible games being played by this government, and all at the expense of the well-being of Ontario citizens.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to speak in this House and respond to some of the comments from my colleague from Barrie on G11, the air ambulance act. He had one line in his remarks that is going to stick with me for a long time. It explains a lot of stuff, and I'd really like to compliment him on it. It's, "You can't light a fire and call yourself a hero when you go put it out." I couldn't agree with that one more.

At the end of his remarks, he talked about whistle-blowers, and that's a very important subject, not only in Ornge—the problems at Ornge have pretty well been identified, you know. There's a laser-light focus on Ornge. But there are all kinds of other problems out there, because it's a big government, a big ministry.

I'm going to put a laser-light focus on another one in my riding, where I've got nine whistle-blowers being sued by a hospital which is funded by the LHIN, controlled by the ministry, and they're all saying, "Well, there's nothing we can do." What do you mean there's nothing you can do? If the CEO of the hospital wants to step down and sue those people himself for defamation, go ahead. But for the CEO and the hospital board to use public funds to sue whistle-blowers—what kind of message does that send to the other people who know what's going wrong in this province?

The thing that really bothers us on this corner is that this is a huge scandal, but in all our businesses—I also run a private business—if there's a big problem, you look for ways to make sure you learn from that problem so it doesn't happen the next time. That's how you make your business better. That's how you make the province better. They haven't learned that, because they talk a good talk, but when you see actual cases where public funds are used to sue whistle-blowers, they haven't learned the lesson.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's a pleasure to stand today to talk about this legislation. I would like to thank the member from Barrie for his comments. What his comments don't do is come up with solutions, creative solutions to move forward and to move the province forward.

When you talk to people, especially when you go into communities like Don Valley East that I represent, you talk to people in Ontario, they always come back and say, "Well, what are we doing to move forward as a province?" This government has looked at any problem that exists within government, and we're looking for creative ways to move forward. I think the member from Barrie

has not come up with a single solution to move forward, and I think people are sick and tired of partisan politics in this province.

The opposition's job in this House is not to just criticize and to watch; it's to come up with solutions and to work with government. I think people are sick and tired, in this province, of an opposition that is so blinded by the pursuit of power and so blinded by partisan politics that it doesn't have the ability to look and to come up with creative solutions to move forward.

I think people in Ontario want to move forward, and I think the opposition needs to tune in to what people in this province are talking about and actually come up with solutions. Come up with some solutions and come over to our committees—your committees—and come up with ideas so you can strengthen legislation. Don't just come in with criticism, criticism, criticism; come in with solutions.

This government has acknowledged that things in the past have not gone perfectly. We've acknowledged that. We've said that, time after time. If we see a problem—and I think it's the role of government: If there's a problem, come up with some solutions. I'd ask the opposition and the third party to look at ways within this legislation to find some solutions and work with this government so it benefits not only this House, but the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Word and deeds, Speaker; the distance between words and deeds. We, on this side of the House, saw that when we voted in solidarity to call for an all-party select committee of the Legislature to uncover the truth around the Ornge scandal. The members of this party opposite locked arms against that motion, and despite promises to honour the will of the Legislature and the all-party special select committee vote, they have continually refused to back the cause of transparency and accountability.

This government does not want answers; it wants silence. It does not want collaboration; it wants compliance to its will. We should not simply make do with the appearance of integrity, Speaker. Ignorance should not be considered a best practice.

In closing, I would like to salute the brave whistle-blowers and dedicated journalists who woke up this government to its shortcomings and reminded it of its duty. I would like to applaud and commend the dedicated efforts of my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora and the member from Nickel Belt, who have taken point on this file over the last several months and who have increased understanding of the complex and convoluted drama. I'd like to acknowledge, as well, the many other members, past and present, who work here in this House and in committee, who have helped open a window into the shadowy world of Ornge.

We do not yet have all the details, Speaker. We may never know the full extent of the truth around this case. Apparently, the party opposite would be perfectly okay with that. We, on this side, are not.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was very interesting to listen to the member from Barrie, who was able to show his depth of understanding as to what went wrong at Ornge. Then, he was able to contrast this with the bill that we have in front of us, the bill that we are supposed to work on, that is supposed to fix what went wrong at Ornge. But nothing in this bill will change one iota of anything.

Yesterday, we happened to have the new CEO of Ornge come as a deputant for the public accounts committee, where I sit. He basically echoed what the member from Barrie is talking about: that what we have in the bill right now is not going to change what's going on at Ornge. The changes that needed to happen at Ornge have been done without passing the bill. Plus, if you look at what's in the bill, it is so incompetent at doing what it says that it wants to do.

0930

We all agreed that had the government listened to the whistle-blowers that started to go to them directly in 2008—we're in 2013, Mr. Speaker; five years ago, whistle-blowers started to go to the ministry. You know what happened to them? They lost their jobs. And then they were supposed to have the money to sue their employers to get their jobs back? Who are we kidding here? But yet, what we have in the bill is not going to change anything. If you blow the whistle, you will still lose your job; you will still be without a penny to go to court, hire a lawyer to try to get your job back. They haven't learned, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Barrie, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I appreciate all the comments from my colleagues.

I think it's important to take notice of this bill, because I'd like to think that the government has the best intentions with Ornge. We have to believe that everybody wants the best for this province. That's why I think it's so shameful that this bill fails on so many levels to provide the real mechanisms we need to fix Ornge. It really is a fundamental thing.

The health care system is huge. It is a massive bureaucracy, it is a massive government ministry. It represents almost half of the total budget of the province. So in that respect, Ornge is actually a pretty small piece of it, but it's also a very important piece of it, and it's representative of what's wrong in our health care system and what's wrong with our government. It's an opportunity for this Liberal government to take hold of a problem, acknowledge the problem, talk about the problem amongst yourselves, if you have to, and fix it—really fix it.

You know, you've told us that you agree that Chris Mazza was wrong, and he managed this company right into the ground for his own benefit and the benefit of several others. We know that; you know that. You have an opportunity to take this bill and put real substantive change into Ornge, and make sure that it provides the best possible air ambulance service that this province

absolutely deserves. Without it, people are going to die, eventually. That's what it boils down to—

Interjection: They have.

Mr. Rod Jackson: People have died.

It's a shame that this bill has an opportunity to fix it, and it's not. That's where I'm really disappointed. This is a second go-around to fix a problem that really should be fixed quite easily, and it's not. I have to wonder why. Is it because you're afraid to acknowledge that it was a problem, or is it because you don't have the capability to fix it? Both worry me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you and good morning to everybody, on the day after happiness day.

I'm one of those individuals that chooses—I make choices, and I choose to be happy every day. I choose to do things respectfully and honourably because that's one of the biggest reasons why I'm here at Queen's Park on behalf of the people in Algoma–Manitoulin. I can only hope that I live up to their expectations and what they're anticipating hearing from me while I'm here. We all have those choices. We all have the opportunities to provide solutions. I think that my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane has provided a solution to enhancing this bill, G11, the Ambulance Amendment Act, so now it falls on the responsibility of our friends across the way to listen to that solution.

I'm going to be providing another solution this morning. Over the course of my notes this morning, I hope that you can absorb the theme that is being put across to you, and that you take that in and you take it with serious consideration.

As many of my colleagues have stated, there are many elements that could be added to this bill to make it stronger and give Ontarians some piece of mind, knowing that this will never happen again. It brings me great comfort and confidence that my colleague from Nickel Belt, the health and long-term care critic, has been working tirelessly on this issue to try to get the answers for Ontarians, and bringing in some type of accountability, and it is through her work, along with the colleagues that we have who are going to be involved with this at the committee stages, that I'm going to be able to get the answers that I'm looking for, for people back home in Algoma–Manitoulin.

While this bill allows cabinet to appoint representatives to the board of designated air ambulance service providers and appoint a supervisor or special investigator, I am disappointed that there is no mention of Ornge being subject to freedom of information anywhere in this bill. That is a suggestion.

Again, this bill could have gone so much further if the government really wanted to commit to providing appropriate accountability measures. Here's a suggestion: Ontario's Ombudsman will not have oversight of the agency. The lack of accountability and transparency is something I take issue with, as providing Ombudsman

oversight is the ultimate commitment to accountability. Although this bill allows the minister to issue directives to air ambulance, I fail to see how that will change how things have been done in the past. When reading this bill, it becomes clear that all the Liberal government is committing to is keeping the old status quo going on and on.

We have seen the Auditor General's report on Ornge, and we have heard committee testimony. Not only does this bill come up short, it is being implemented completely after the fact and is clearly a reactive approach. It appears to be more of an attempt to change the channel, but the bill still falls very short of being able to accomplish this.

It's been clear that the new Premier has been taking notes from the old Premier and the Minister of Health by trying to push the blame on everyone but themselves for the issues that have happened at Ornge. The Liberals have been trying to use the fact that Ornge was a federally incorporated entity; however, I don't see how this prevented them from providing the necessary oversight to avoid this mess. After all, Ontario's hospitals are federally incorporated, and this has no impact on oversight.

This is a prime opportunity to create a bill that could prevent such disregard for taxpayers' dollars and ensure that it doesn't happen again; this opportunity has been completely wasted. I am unclear as to how this bill will actually do much at all to prevent us from seeing this time and time again.

Blaming the opposition for this mess is not productive; creating useful legislation is. What is most disappointing is that this bill could have done so much more—so much more. So if this government can't even admit that they were wrong, that they had a role to play in creating this disaster, how can we trust that they are trying to find ways to actually assure Ontarians that this will not happen again? We need transparency; we need to make this transparency standard practice instead of waiting for the next scandal to further disappoint Ontario taxpayers.

Vous savez, le gouvernement a une chance maintenant de reprendre un nouveau cours, une nouvelle direction. Comment est-ce qu'ils peuvent adresser la crédibilité que la province est en train de ressentir avec le scandale qui est arrivé à travers notre système de santé? Et puis, si on continue à pointer les doigts et on continue à blâmer les autres, on n'est vraiment pas en train de préciser la direction, et puis le blâme qu'on devrait regarder sur soi-même. Pour faire un changement, il faut qu'on reconnaisse l'erreur qu'on a faite à travers des actions qu'on a prises comme un gouvernement et les actions que vous n'avez pas prises.

Il y avait des chances à travers de tout ce dossier où il y aurait pu avoir des chances de prendre une action corrective, positive, pour éliminer beaucoup des pertes qu'on a subies à travers de ce scandale. Mais la première étape, c'est de prendre la charge et la responsabilité comme le gouvernement de se planter les deux pieds et puis dire : « J'ai fait erreur; on corrige. On prend une nouvelle direction dans la province. » Mais ce n'est pas

ça que la province a fait. On a tout fait pour blâmer les autres droit. On a blâmé les chiens et les chats—tout le monde qui était impliqué dans l'affaire, et puis on n'a jamais regardé à soi-même pour dire : « On a fait erreur. »

On est ici pour faire quoi? Une suggestion que je vous donne—et puis ça va être beaucoup de sujets dont je vais parler aujourd'hui : il faut qu'on donne le droit à l'ombudsman d'avoir ses doigts, ses yeux, ses mains, son temps à regarder et à aller dans cette situation—aller par en avant. C'est la seule façon qu'on peut regarder comment on peut résoudre tout ce pétrin où on est présentement rentré.

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So how can we trust a government that is clearly continuing to move forward with no transparency? When organizations know they are under FOI, they will undoubtedly behave in a different manner, one would think, so why is it not explicitly provided under this legislation? Yes, we are talking about mismanagement of money—taxpayers' money. That is a huge, huge concern alone. However, what is more worrisome is that air ambulance deals with life-and-death situations. This is a critical organization, and the services they provide are of the utmost importance. When things go wrong, families deserve to know the facts and have closure, knowing that this will never happen again, especially in such high-risk scenarios. Depriving these grieving families from getting this information and closure is unacceptable. Depriving Ontario families from knowing this will not happen again is, again, unacceptable.

Ontarians would agree that organizations such as Ornge need to be under the mandate of the Ombudsman. This oversight of health care organizations is so desperately needed. When the lives of Ontarians are hanging in the balance, why wouldn't we want our provincial figurehead of accountability to have oversight into these important organizations? Had the Ombudsman had oversight, perhaps—perhaps—we would not have been in this mess today.

It is clear that this government is not taking steps to be proactive in preventing this type of situation from happening again. But they can't even take the time to be reactive and acknowledge the fact that the Ombudsman should have had oversight into Ornge the whole time. Ombudsman André Marin has expressed this concern time and time again. We know that without Ombudsman oversight, there will be no credible accountability.

I want to read a statement that the Ombudsman had sent to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and to the critics of both opposition parties as well. It reads:

“There is no doubt that any steps to increase the accountability of the air ambulance service is welcomed. Indeed, in the wake of the many stories of maladministration horrors that have plagued Ornge, sound public policy to bring proper oversight to this organization is still sorely needed.

“While moving in the right direction, measures such as the establishment of an Ornge patient advocate and

Bill 11's creation of a new bureaucracy of 'special investigators' are insufficient to provide much-needed scrutiny, and continue to shield Ornge from Ombudsman oversight. My office remains unable to address any individual or systemic issues involving Ornge.

“The Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario is a unique resource to support the Legislative Assembly in holding government accountable. It is there to allow the provincial Parliament to scrutinize government bodies. I cannot think of a more persuasive case for this than Ornge.

“Special investigators,' under Bill 11, would enjoy authority similar to that of my office when it investigates the more than 500 ministries, agencies, boards, commissions, tribunals and corporations that fall under our jurisdiction. But there is an important difference: The 'special investigators' would report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. They would not be independent of government. Far from being watchdogs, they would operate on a ministerial dog leash.

“The newly created office of patient advocate has been positioned by the government as an additional oversight body that alleviates the need to extend Ombudsman oversight to Ornge. The Ombudsman is a fully independent officer of Parliament, established by statute with a mandate to investigate individual and systemic issues. By contrast, the patient advocate reports to an Ornge vice-president, not even to the board of directors. He or she resides within the bowels of the organization and cannot be expected to investigate any issue with institutional credibility. When this position was publicly advertised, the first line of the 'Duties and Responsibilities' in the job description noted that the incumbent would be required to '[I]nvestigate, resolve, document, report organization-specific patient and visitor compliments and complaints'.... Needless to say, a position that involves reporting compliments back to management ought not to be confused with the role of the Ombudsman.

“The recent and proposed changes to Ornge are often put forward as responses to the Auditor General's March 2012 special report, Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services. Yet nowhere in his report did he recommend”—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask the members who are having a discussion over here to keep it down?

Mr. Michael Mantha: —“(a) a new bureaucracy of 'special investigators'; (b) the creation of a patient advocate residing deep within Ornge whose partial responsibilities include being a clearing house for 'compliments'; or (c) the maintenance of the status quo with respect to the exclusion of any role for the Ombudsman.

“Every year, our office responds to tens of thousands of complaints, consistently demonstrating its value to elected representatives and the public. As 'Ontario's Watchdog,' we are the gold standard in keeping government maladministration at bay”—gold standard. “It simply does not make sense to perpetuate our exclusion in a bill that purports to bring credible accountability to Ornge. I would respectfully request your support in

bringing the necessary amendments to Bill 11 to ensure that it meets the purpose for which it was presented to the Legislative Assembly.”

Again, the suggestion is, let’s look at Ombudsman oversight. I hope the other side is listening. We need Ombudsman oversight. It is the only way this bill will provide some type of accountability and transparency.

The patient advocate role reports to Ornge’s vice-president, not even the public or the board of directors. This is a total lack of transparency and a serious concern for the public. How can we possibly call this credible accountability? Why do Ontarians not deserve the highest form of accountability into this organization after the mess we just went through? How could the patient advocate maintain a neutral party in conflict or complaints when they report directly to the company’s vice-president? It seems to me as though this is a sad attempt to convince the public that oversight has been added, but in reality the government could have actually added real accountability by allowing the Ombudsman oversight.

So why have the Liberals not taken this step? Clearly they are not really serious about preventing similar catastrophes from happening again. They are not giving Ontarians what they deserve. Instead, they are trying to trick them into believing that real changes have been made—again, window dressing.

In Algoma–Manitoulin and much of northern Ontario, we know how many of our services are being cut. We often travel great distances to seek medical attention, and there isn’t funding for important health projects that our community so desperately needs. I speak to constituents who travel many hours away—often three times a week—for dialysis or other medical treatments, often on dangerous roads and in poor driving conditions, especially in the winter months. This can be very costly and time-consuming, especially for individuals whose illness prevents them from working. For these folks forced to survive on disability, their income is inadequate to cover or front such costs as travel. They depend on the Northern Health Travel Grant to cover these costs, but significant delays for reimbursement are causing serious problems for many northerners.

I have raised the plight of a constituent from Chapleau in the Legislature before, who must travel to Timmins for dialysis three times a week and has experienced long delays with the Northern Health Travel Grant. She must drive 12 hours a week and stay in Timmins overnight when the road conditions are bad. It is an exhausting and stressful position to be in. But to make matters worse, she is waiting as long as three months to be reimbursed and is being forced into debt, waiting for her cheques.

I hear from constituents who have to continuously cancel medical appointments because the conditions of the roads are too dangerous to travel on. This means many people are not able to rely on being able to see medical professionals regularly. This is a serious health concern, and no doubt a serious commitment to providing more accessible medical treatment could provide great relief for the region.

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Many northerners cannot even rely on driving to their medical appointments on properly-taken-care-of roads in the winter months because of this government’s decision to further privatize snow removal on road maintenance and services. I hear these stories continuously and view these pictures daily, and the government has been made aware of this serious issue.

It’s difficult to explain to them how this government squanders health care dollars with zero accountability or transparency, and the health care situation in the north is severely deprived. This is money that could have been used to make services more accessible to northerners, but instead the money is once again wasted.

It is sickening for them to know that not only have these health care dollars been squandered but that there have been no real steps taken to ensure that this will not happen again. Leaving the opportunity open for this to happen again will only further devastate health care dollars that should be used to fix serious problems we have in our health care system. Northerners should be able to have peace of mind, knowing that health care dollars will not be wasted in a future similar situation and that priority will be put on improving access to health care. However, this is unlikely to happen because of the lack of commitment to real, credible accountability.

Northern and rural communities need to know that when there is an emergency, there is help close by. This has not always been the case for these folks. These people can’t even rely on being able to get to the closest medical centre, because of the state of the winter roads.

Without transparency in health organizations, northerners are going to continue to suffer. The money is there to create a health care system that makes patients a priority, but clearly the current leadership is failing to do this. This government needs to be accountable and put patients’ needs and our health care service first. This is an opportunity to do right and create real change, providing greater accountability with the best answers possible.

If this government is really serious about preventing this type of catastrophic situation from ever happening again, they would not have made all the provisions aimed at the designated air ambulance provider who is currently under Ornge.

Why could more not be done to ensure scandals like this do not occur in these government-funded agencies? Couldn’t this have been an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and prevent this from ever happening again? How can we sit here and leave open the opportunity for history to keep repeating itself? This bill is ultimately a useless public relations exercise that does not add Ombudsman oversight or provide real transparency or accountability.

When will people again be the priority for this government? The people of Ontario deserve more. This was a perfect opportunity to show Ontarians that the government will learn from its mistake and do better. But the opportunity has just been wasted again, and no real change or commitment will be done or made in this case.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his comments. He's an honourable member of this House who, I believe, has the best interests of his community at hand while he's serving in this House. But there are a few things that I think I'd like to challenge him on, and one is the piece around the changes in the legislation.

I think the Minister of Health has come up with a series of changes within the legislation that I believe speak to the type of government that this government in this House is. It's a solution-focused government that's looking at ways to constantly improve government, and that results in the betterment of all Ontarians.

I think it's a very different type of approach than the official opposition's approach. I was taken aback at the last budget, where—I don't even think it was an hour after the budget was introduced, and the Leader of the Opposition was dismissing it. I know now that he has publicly said that he's not going to support the budget, and the funny thing about that is, the budget hasn't even come out yet. The budget hasn't even come out, and the opposition has said they're not going to support it.

Could you imagine a government—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Could you imagine an opposition that is serving the residents of this province, who actually dismisses a budget even before they see it? I think it speaks volumes to what type of opposition we have.

The job of the opposition in this province is to do two things: It is to be a watchdog and to criticize this government, but also to work with the government to come up with creative solutions to move this province forward. I think they've failed in doing that.

Some of the changes that are there within this legislation are very positive—if I have an opportunity the next time I speak, I'll bring those up—but I think Ontarians know exactly where we want to go, and it's what this side of the House is doing in order to bring the changes that they want to go in. We'll see that change coming soon with this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened patiently to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. I thought he brought a true story of his community and how important that air ambulance service is for northern Ontario. I would say it is an important service for all Ontarians, when and where it is needed.

The real point here is the scandal that has plagued Ornge. This bill here, out of respect to the minister, should really have been introduced after the hearings that are being held right now. At the hearings themselves, the inquiry into the scandal at Ornge, I think there will be some solid input that would improve the bill. All of us

here want to improve the efficiency and also eliminate the waste in Ontario, the scandalous waste.

An example of that—it wasn't so much covered by the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, but I think I'll try to cover it here. Here's an article that I saw recently in the paper. It's out of, I believe, the Toronto Star, which is a fairly Liberal-friendly paper; in fact, it is a Liberal paper. The title here is, "Insurance for Ornge Head Cost \$450,000." This is a waste of \$10-million life insurance. Here's what it says here; this is by Rob Ferguson: "Ornge took out a \$10-million life insurance policy on its highly paid former chief executive, Dr. Chris Mazza, in the latest example of" excessive spending and trouble at the "air ambulance agency...."

This is what our critic, Frank Klees, was saying. This is another example of—I believe he was making about \$1.5 million, plus he was on the take, really, from other hospitals who were using him as a consultant. That's what we want: to get to the bottom of this and open it up so we can all have a look at it. The committee is dealing with it.

The problem with this Bill 11—it's the second attempt at it, and they prorogued the House so that we couldn't deal with it at that time. I agree with certain sections. The protection for whistle-blowers is an admirable feature. The minister already has that authority—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's great to be here today, as always, and it's always great to hear my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin speak in this House, because he always speaks with heart, compassion and integrity.

When it comes to this bill, again—I've put my responses forward before; we'll put them forward again. We need to see Ombudsman oversight. We need to see whistle-blower protection. We need to see this expanded outside of this particular file, where we know there will be good scrutiny in the future, to make sure that all ministries and agencies are covered in this province.

I think back—I became politicized in the days of Mike Harris, and I remember a minister named John Snobelen who is on record as saying they were going to create a crisis in education—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You know who really did it? Laurel Broten did.

Mr. Jonah Schein: There's still a crisis in public education, but there was certainly an understanding that there was an intentionality behind that government when it came to breaking government, in fact, because that's the ideology of conservatives in this country: to break government, to destroy public services. I don't know; the jury's out whether the government feels the same way, if they're intentionally working to destroy public confidence in our public institutions or if they're just messing this up by mistake. Either way, I would agree with my colleagues over here, with the Conservatives, that they're doing a good job of destroying public confidence, and that is a tremendous issue.

I heard the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration take the new talking points in talking about the oppos-

ition, about partisanship and so forth. We have real differences about where we stand; I'm here with the NDP because I believe strongly in public services. We need to restore faith in these public services. We need to make sure that people know that when they spend their tax dollars, it goes into public services, that we can build transit in our cities, that we can invest in our health care. And this government is doing a really good job in undermining that public confidence right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

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Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I listened very carefully to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. I was trying to think back to when my first experience was with air ambulance services. One of the first jobs I ever had was at Sick Children's Hospital. It was one of my first jobs, and one of the first things I noticed when I worked there was that a couple of times a day the building would vibrate, because there is actually a helipad above the hospital. That was my first experience of that emergency service delivering people who were critically injured and landing, and families who expected to get the best service.

Nothing has changed about the air ambulance service. I think there are still families around this province who rely on that service, and certainly the member from Barrie talked about what people's vision of that service is. I don't think that's changed. People still expect the most competent, the most professional individuals using those services to transport somebody who's critically injured at a very traumatic time in people's lives. They expect the service to work, and certainly I think this legislation is about restoring faith and building that service to a new level of accountability and transparency.

I think that the member from Algoma–Manitoulin talked about the unique challenges in the north. Whether it's roads or access or the communications system, it's always a challenge in the north. I respect the information that he brings to the table, and I think that those are conversations that we need to have on an ongoing basis.

I think amending the Ambulance Act is about strengthening that public service that people have grown to rely on and need at a very critical time in their life. It's about supporting those 600 front-line employees who work every day to protect our families, arriving when we're at our most needy and vulnerable and providing a service that helps save our families and gives us confidence going into the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Once again, I'm a happy kind of guy. I want to acknowledge the comments that came from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the member from Durham and the member from Davenport. I'd like to touch on one of the points that he raised, as returning faith into our public services. I also appreciate the comments that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing had to offer.

We expect our services to be there, and we expect them to work. What I'm trying to raise, by having Ombudsman oversight through this process and included within this act, is exactly when those services don't work, where something happens along the way, where there are questions that have happened, where we need that third set of eyes to oversee that issue. That is what we're asking for in my notes that I was doing this morning.

Again, we all know where fingers are being pointed. I don't want to sit here or stand here and lay blame anywhere. I don't think that's very productive to anybody in this House. We all know what happened. Let's recognize what has happened, but let's really fix it. Let's really sit down and look at how we can fix this—not just some of it, all of it—so that we can make sure that we have real whistle-blower protections that are going to be there as individuals like my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane has indicated, that doesn't happen in his area; that we have real oversight so that the province and people who are back home who are looking at this and wondering, how does this happen?—so that they have the opportunity to answer questions; and that our gold standard, which is our Ombudsman, has the opportunity to have oversight into these matters.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to join this debate, and again, I want to say, as I said a few minutes ago, I'm very grateful to the paramedics and the pilots and all those front-line staff at Ornge who, from the very beginning and for many years, continue to put our patients first—our family members. I understand it's about 600 employees who work every day on the front lines, and I think this legislation that we're talking about today is about changing, moving it to a new chapter and putting us on the right path forward. Certainly we've heard from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care that there have been some significant changes in the leadership, and it matters that you have the right people at the helm.

They've hired Dr. Andrew McCallum—he's the president and CEO—and they've hired Rob Giguere as the chief operating officer. Dr. McCallum was trained as a military flight surgeon, so he knows what he's talking about, and he's the former chief coroner of Ontario.

As well, Ornge has also appointed a new board of directors, and that was led by Ian W. Delaney. He's the chairman of Sherritt International. As well, they've appointed a quality-of-care committee under the direction of Barry McLellan, president and CEO of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. They know a lot about emergency care, so Dr. McLellan will be helpful in looking at that quality of care.

This year, they submitted their first quality improvement plan to build on the achievements of previous years, and certainly a quality improvement plan is a very extensive exercise. It's like a strategic plan for your health care going forward. Under that new leadership, those quality-of-care projects and the leadership are going to be putting patients first. That's about respecting taxpayers and valuing transparency.

As well, we've also got Ornge's first patient advocate; that is Denise Polgar. It's a newly created position, and it's unique in the field of air ambulance and medical transport. That patient advocate is someone who supports patients and their families, as well as working to resolve their concerns about patient care and service.

As I said earlier, when you're in the middle of a traumatic event, when someone you love has been critically injured, sometimes the communications with how you transport somebody, when they arrive, what kind of services they get, are mysterious to families, and so somebody like a patient advocate will help assess those complaints, help the patients and the family navigate through a very foreign system when you aren't used to anything in health care of that nature.

Miss Polgar will also advocate for operational improvements based on the lessons that she learns from that patient complaints process, and that will be guided by the principles of the new patient declaration of values.

Miss Polgar is bringing to Ornge extensive experience in both emergency services and the hospital setting. I understand she began her career as a paramedic, so she knows what it's like being on the front line. She spent nearly a decade with Brant county ambulance. Since then, she's worked as an ambulance dispatcher and a trainer, a program developer and coordinator for emergency telecommunications, and, most recently, as an injury prevention specialist and educator for the London Health Sciences Centre.

Miss Polgar has a strong understanding of the health care sector, and she's collaborated with a variety of hospitals and community agencies to implement positive and measurable change.

At the same time that we have, at Ornge, instituted a new patient advocate, Ornge has also installed new medical interiors in its helicopters. They've expanded service in Thunder Bay. They've established a dedicated patient flight service in northern Ontario, which obviously is something that would be of interest to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

As well, as I said, they've submitted their first quality improvement plan, and they have created a whistle-blower policy. I think certainly we've heard from a few of the members this morning about their concerns about the policy. At the end of the day, this policy is meant to help employees fulfil Ornge's mandate of compassionate care with the highest-quality standards of ethics and professionalism. The policy will be implemented through the appointment of Grant Thornton, a leading Canadian accounting, audit and business advisory firm, as the independent ethics officer for Ornge. As someone who is responsible for the independent ethics officer, Mr. Thornton will be receiving and tracking employee disclosures in a safe and confidential manner. He will then examine and assess each disclosure to determine if further steps are warranted. The firm has full discretion to conduct investigations and make recommendations, and will ensure that the complainant is protected from reprisal.

These are significant improvements, but we understand that there is more to do.

We believe that this legislation takes the next step in restoring public confidence to Ornge. If passed, this bill will entrench protections for employees who disclose information to an inspector, an investigator or the ministry.

The bill will allow the government to take control of Ornge in extraordinary circumstances through the appointment of a supervisor or to appoint special investigators, just as we do with our hospitals.

As well, the bill would allow the government to change the performance agreement with Ornge at any time.

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In addition to this legislation, our government is also proposing to make Ornge retroactively subject to freedom-of-information requests. This is a very important distinction, because it's in keeping with our commitment to transparency across the broader public sector, and these measures represent common ground between the government and the opposition.

The steps we're proposing today will provide the strong oversight we believe is necessary to ensure a brighter and stronger future for the future of Ontario's air ambulance service. We are very committed to improving the culture at Ornge, and the new performance agreement strengthens government oversight and improves patient care. Significant improvements to the accountability and the transparency have been made by posting executive expenses and salary ranges online.

New policies and procedures on conflict of interest and whistle-blower protections have been introduced. As I previously stated, we appointed an independent ethics officer to receive, investigate and track employee disclosures as part of the new whistle-blower protection policy.

It's all part of our government's well-established track record on extending the coverage of the province's access and privacy legislation, including bringing under the legislation Ontario hospitals in 2012, Cancer Care Ontario in 2010, publicly funded universities in 2006, and the energy sector, including Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and public utilities, back in 2004 and 2005.

Our government believes it's important to continue to take steps to ensure that citizens have knowledge and transparency because we believe their right to know is foremost in considering requests for information and in making government information more publicly available.

At the end of the day, this legislation is about improving patient care. As I said, Ornge hired a patient advocate to work with patients and their families to address concerns and to advocate for operational improvements. As I said, we've installed new, improved interim medical interiors in the fleet of AW139 helicopters after extensive consultation with the front-line staff, the people who actually use the facilities. We obtained Transport Canada's approval for the interim interior for that aircraft.

As well, we've taken steps to introduce a third line of paramedics at the Thunder Bay base to help ensure 24/7 service for northern Ontario. They've created a dedicated flight service for the Sault-Ste.-Marie-to-Sudbury corri-

dor, increasing patient access to out-of-town treatment, and they've launched a pilot project in Ottawa on the use of critical care land vehicles in place of a helicopter for certain calls when it's deemed that they're appropriate for patient care.

Some other achievements that Ornge has made, which probably haven't received the attention that they deserve, is that we've declared a new declaration of patient values; as well, they have developed an online patient relations portal and guaranteed feedback to patient complaints.

As well, they have redesigned programs to expedite the paramedic training and education process, including a new program to fast-track training upgrades for primary care paramedics to become advanced care paramedics, because at the end of the day, the people who are on the front line—the best education that they have results in better care for someone who's in the midst of a crisis.

As well, Ornge consolidated three operational divisions under one chief operating officer. They consolidated all operational and scheduling functions into one team for improved coverage and service effectiveness.

Ornge has developed and implemented certification material for their operations control centre. They've obtained a three-year operator certificate from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for air and critical care land ambulance operations.

I think it's clear, Speaker, that these changes indicate that Ornge and the board are on the right track. The bill that we're debating today will help ensure that it stays on the right track, because we believe that accountability and transparency are very important.

The services at Ornge are part of our province's first-rate health care, and certainly I value that. In a community that has had very high growth—Brampton—Springdale, the riding that I represent—health care is very important, whether it's land ambulance or whether it's air ambulance. Everybody believes that better health care is what we, as a government, need to deliver. We've seen the results of those investments certainly translate into better wait times, certainly at William Osler Health Centre.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'd like to introduce Rabbi Yermi Cohen and his son Mendy, who are here, as they come every year, to present me with the shmurah matzah in anticipation of Passover, which starts next week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, and welcome.

Ms. Cindy Forster: All of my guests aren't here yet—they're still being processed—but I want to welcome 60 visitors from my community. They're here to listen to the health care issues here today. I want to introduce some of them. I have Frank Campion, who's not here yet—he is a councillor from the city of Welland; Mary Ann Grimaldi, a councillor from the city of Welland; and Dan Fortier and Michael Petrachenko, both councillors from the city of Welland.

I have Heather Cross and Christine Simpson, both ONA members—local coordinator, Local 26—from the Niagara area.

I also have Pat Scholfield, who is an advocate for health care in the Niagara region, and I have Sue Hotte as well from the Niagara Health Coalition.

I welcome them all to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. Yesterday I asked about missing gas plant documents, and the Premier answered, "All that has been asked for has been provided."

In sworn testimony Tuesday, cabinet secretary Peter Wallace said the committee has not yet been provided with all the documents related to the Mississauga and Oakville power plant cancellations.

Speaker, the Premier is telling us one thing and people swearing an oath are telling us the opposite. We now have proof that cabinet members said we have all the documents when they knew there were more, and we have proof that they said the total cost of Oakville was \$40 million when they knew it was hundreds of millions more.

Deputy Premier, can you explain the difference between those statements and those sworn under oath?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I have to say that I am delighted that the justice committee work is well under way, delighted that Mayor Hazel McCallion was there this morning, and I'm very pleased that the scope of the committee has been expanded to include tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation.

Speaker, this is a committee of this Legislature doing its job. I think it's doing a thorough and very good job, and I look forward to the committee doing their work and completing their work. I think we all have a lot to learn from that work that is under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We do have a lot to learn. In fact, we have been learning a lot. What we've learned so far is that this gas plant scandal has many tentacles and it's feeding off of many ministries. For instance, the cabinet board itself is deep in this. The energy minister is busy working on retractions of earlier statements. The House

leader sounds like a broken record, and you will soon learn that the Attorney General is now involved. So let's add the finance minister to this mix.

The OPA swore under oath about the hundreds of millions of additional dollars. You've got a budget coming up soon. What amount will your government be listing in the budget for the gas plant scandal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to go back to—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're going to bring it right down. Thank you.

House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to go back to the first question that was put forward by the honourable member about Mr. Wallace's testimony and provide him with a quotation from Mr. Wallace yesterday: "It is my belief that the Ministry of Energy acted in good faith in searching for and producing documents in their possession that they understood were responsive to the committee's request."

Mr. Speaker, the honourable member says that I've turned into a broken record, so let me put something new out here for everyone here. Let me quote Mayor Hazel McCallion at her very thorough, thorough appearance before committee this morning. She said, "The government listened to the people. The people of Mississauga are fed up of hearing all of this controversy at Queen's Park over something that they wanted cancelled. The government agreed to cancel"—

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Cabinet secretary Peter Wallace told us that government is driving the bus, and he also made another revelation to the justice committee on Tuesday. He told us that the Ministry of the Attorney General has launched an investigation into the accusation of political interference with the OPA.

Your government failed to disclose any information of the Attorney General's investigation into whether or not a former Liberal staffer turned bureaucrat directed the OPA to withhold documents from members of this House. Why was this investigation being discussed in secret, conducted in secret, and why didn't your government at any time tell the public about this further twist to this gas plant scandal?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to finish the Hazel McCallion quote, to begin: "The government listened to the people. The people of Mississauga are fed up of hearing all of this controversy at Queen's Park over something that they wanted cancelled. The government agreed to cancel it. Come on. Let's get on with the business of the province, folks."

As to the other item that was raised, Mr. Wallace appeared in front of the committee. Yesterday, he answered questions in that regard, and that is the place for this type of discussion to go on. The committee has an opportunity to call witnesses and to look into any matter related to it. But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I think maybe some

of the fishing expedition should be put to the side and they should focus on some of the important issues before the committee.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the finance minister this morning. Mr. Finance Minister, we know that cabinet was privy to a memorandum of understanding on September 24 of last year outlining the fact that the costs for relocating the Oakville power plant would well exceed the \$40-million cost that your government has repeatedly given the House.

While we're quoting the mayor of Mississauga, your mayor, she also told the committee this morning that it was going to cost somewhere between \$800 million and \$1 billion to cancel the power plants. How does she know that when you don't know that, because you were in cabinet when that MOU was circulated?

As the man with his hand on the purse strings of the province, as the former chair of the Liberal platform committee, exactly how could you allow members of the government to claim that the cost of Oakville would be \$40 million when you knew that that number was wrong?

Hon. Charles Sousa: What I do know is that the siting of these power plants needs to be readdressed, and one of the things that has come out as a result of these deliberations is that we have to do proper setbacks and ensure that we're assessing these things more appropriately. We've listened to the people of Mississauga and we've listened to the people of Oakville, and I've done my job in representing the constituents right around the area. None of these plants were actually in my riding. But what's important is that we protect the interests of the public right throughout the province, and that's what we're doing as a result of these initiatives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Finance Minister, the accountability has to start at the top on this issue, and you're the man now in charge of the money for the province.

The MOU clearly showed that you and cabinet knew, back on September 24, that the costs would exceed \$40 million, and you kept trying to sell that number to the members of this House and to the people of Ontario. Are you telling this House, as the Treasurer for the province, that the finance ministry has no idea how much money it's going to have to spend to cover the cost of the Liberal Party's decision to cancel the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville?

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finance Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, to the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The one factor that the honourable member is failing to mention is that his party was opposed to the gas plant themselves. In fact, this morning Mayor Hazel McCallion said, "I think all parties would have cancelled it; there's no question about it.... In fact, I would say that the citizens were in touch with both the

Conservatives and with the NDP, no question about it. They not only appealed to the Premier and the present government; they definitely appealed to the Conservatives and the NDP. There's no question about it."

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, we have a committee that's looking into this matter. But will the Conservative Party come forward with their costing, with their policy analysis, with the work that they did before they went out and made YouTube videos about how they were going to cancel this project? Why are they leaving that part out when they ask these questions?

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

Mr. Todd Smith: The government fails to understand the crux of this issue.

I'll go back to the committee testimony this morning from the mayor of Mississauga, Mayor Hazel McCallion, the mayor of the community where the finance minister now lives. The mayor said this morning that the citizens of Mississauga, the staff, the council and the people of Mississauga were prepared to accept a plant in the right location. Was the plant cancelled to save seats? she asks. "Who can deny it?" she says. Obviously it was. "It should have been cancelled" well "before a permit was issued," not in the middle of an election campaign to save five Liberal seats. It should have been made before the campaign even started.

She also says—get this—that Mississauga residents "are not interested in wasting taxpayer money." What's your answer to that?

Hon. John Milloy: I think what Mayor Hazel McCallion said this morning—to repeat it—is, "The government listened to the people. The people of Mississauga are fed up of hearing all of this controversy at Queen's Park over something that they wanted cancelled. The government agreed to cancel it. Come on. Let's get on with the business of the province, folks."

The honourable member talks about politics; well, maybe he can explain the politics of his leader going the day before the election and making a YouTube video where he stood surrounded by adoring candidates and proclaimed that this plant, if he became Premier, would be "done, done, done."

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. People in Ontario want to see a balanced approach to balancing the books in your upcoming budget. New Democrats have put forward a plan to close some corporate tax loopholes so that we can balance the books and make the tax system a little more fair. Can the minister tell us whether he's ready to move on these proposals?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question and as well for your input. It's critically important that we do work together in putting forward a budget that meets the needs of the public and the people of Ontario.

The proposals made by the NDP are being taken seriously. Tax avoidance programs by the corporates that exist is something that we are looking into, and in association with your support, we have already written to Minister Flaherty—his budget's coming out today, as you know. We've already had some of these things addressed. We also have to take a look at the underground economy as well as some of the other particulars that you put forward. We do appreciate your input.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I thank the minister, but last week we learned that the finance minister had written his federal counterpart about tightening corporate tax compliance. That's one very small step forward towards balancing the books, but it's a baby step. We've identified measures that will save \$1.3 billion annually, and thus far the government has only followed up on the one that saves the least amount of money. Is the minister saying that he plans to ignore this billion-dollar tax loophole, or are you going to act on all of it?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We are taking a look at everything being brought forward, as well as putting forward even other initiatives that we think are important to take a balanced approach in our budget. We have to take this balanced approach because we want to ensure that we reduce our deficit and make a zero deficit by 2017-18.

We do have a sensitive recovery. We have to take proper steps. We cannot take extreme measures, because of that sensitive recovery, but we are moving forward. We're looking at tax avoidance. We're looking at some of the restricted tax credits that you've brought forward, as well as auto insurance and the employer health tax exemptions. All of these things are being taken into consideration.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Minister, with respect, I think nothing we have suggested should be described as "extreme measures." What we are saying is that people are expecting some basic fairness as we push to balance the books. They're being told that nurses have to be fired; they're being told that school repairs must be delayed and that the cost of living has to keep climbing. When they see that the government plans to roll out a new tax credit to hand a tax break to Ontario's largest corporations so they can get cheaper meals and drinks, they just don't think that's fair.

Will the minister commit to taking some real steps to balancing the books in a balanced way and close all of those corporate tax loopholes that we have identified?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I think what I'm saying, and what we have to understand, is that we have to take those measures in order to take a balanced approach. What I'm saying is that we have to take these things into consideration. That's why we're taking consultations. That's why we're going around the province and meeting with constituents. That's why SCOFEA is doing its role as well, and that's why we're reaching out to the opposition. We need to work together in order to present a budget

that speaks to the fiscal impacts that appear before us right now, but also about the economic impact in the long term and in the future. We have to position ourselves and build the foundation to benefit Ontarians in the long run. The points you bring forward are essential in those discussions. We are addressing them, and I do thank you for them.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yesterday the new CEO of Ornge was at public accounts; that's Dr. McCallum. When we asked him about the Minister of Health's new air ambulance bill, he said that it would really not change anything from what is currently going on at Ornge. Speaker, the minister has brought forward a useless bill that will not prevent future fiascos in other areas. It is not going to do anything that is not already being done at Ornge right now. Can the minister explain how her bill will be effective, even when the CEO says the opposite?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I must say that's a rather disappointing question because I know the member opposite cares about improving quality of care at Ornge and across our health care system. What Dr. McCallum said was that he has already moved forward on changes at Ornge, but this bill is still an important bill because it does give the ministry more oversight powers. It does require more transparency. It gives us, if we ever need the power, the power to put in a supervisor. I hope we never need to use that power, but if we do need that power in the future, we will have that power, if the bill is successfully passed through the Legislature. I'm glad Dr. McCallum testified. I'm delighted with the progress he's making, moving forward on all of the recommendations, but we still need that bill passed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, oversight by the government is important, but the government did have oversight mechanisms. They chose not to use them. For four long years they were warned, and they did not use the oversight that they had. But now, as time goes by, it's becoming more and more obvious that the air ambulance bill is not going to change anything. It won't do anything to prevent another Ornge from occurring, and this is a real worry because right here, right now, there could be many little Ornges out there, but we wouldn't know. It's the same thing with the whistle-blower protection. The whistle-blower protection they have at Ornge right now is stronger than what's in the bill.

Did the minister hear what Dr. McCallum had to say? Will she admit that her bill is not worth the paper it's written on?

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I absolutely reject that interpretation of what Dr. McCallum has said. Dr. McCallum is leading us now at Ornge. There is a new era of accountability and commitment to patients at Ornge.

He did say that if he does his job right, we won't need to exercise the powers in the bill, and I completely agree with him.

So we are into a new chapter at Ornge that puts patients first. It protects taxpayer investments. There's a new quality improvement protocol in place. We are making terrific progress at Ornge, and I think everyone in this House recognizes that and celebrates that.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I agree with the minister. A lot of the changes have already happened. They already have a new performance agreement. They've already signed on. They already have whistle-blower protection. You know the part that's missing? It's that we need to rebuild the confidence of the people of Ontario into Ornge. How do you do this? How do you rebuild confidence? You give them Ombudsman oversight, so that if I feel that Ornge did me wrong, I will pick up the phone and phone the Ombudsman, and I know that he will investigate, that he will be on my side and that he will help me. We need to rebuild the trust.

Will the minister agree to do the right thing: amend the bill and give Ombudsman oversight of Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know we're making real progress at Ornge when the member from Newmarket–Aurora has this to say after yesterday's testimony by Dr. McCallum. The member from Newmarket–Aurora said, "I was encouraged by Dr. McCallum's testimony. I believe he was very forthcoming with information, and I believe we'll get the truth from Dr. McCallum.... I think that ... Dr. McCallum brings a brand new perspective to openness and transparency."

If the member from Newmarket–Aurora has that to say about Dr. McCallum, then I think we can all agree we've come a long way at Ornge.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Just before I come to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, just a reminder that, moving forward, it's easier for me to hear. I just thought I'd let you know.

The second thing is, I've been hearing, lately, people calling people by their first names, and that is not a tradition in this place. I'd ask to remind members that we use either their title or their riding. It becomes personal, and it escalates the problem instead of bringing it down.

I will now recognize the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for a new question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yesterday at public accounts, the replacement for Chris Mazza, Dr. Andrew McCallum, confirmed Ornge air ambulance has gone in the red by \$2.5 million.

Minister, as you know, \$150 million a year flows into Ornge. Money wasted on Harley choppers, a speedboat, kickbacks for helicopters not suited for CPR, and now we

understand you are awarding employee bonuses of \$2 million.

Minister, how will this bonus bailout and how will the deficit that I just mentioned affect crucial operations at Ornge? How will it affect patient care? Are you planning cutbacks on essential services to pay for these bonuses?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: A year ago the new board at Ornge made a decision—a decision I strongly support—not to award performance pay for this year. That decision was appealed to HRSDC. Ornge lost that appeal, so they are, of course, complying with the ruling from HRSDC.

I do want to say that the new board at Ornge is doing a tremendous job. It is improving quality of care. It is enhancing access to care. We're adding new staff at Ornge, and I think the people of this province are extremely well served by the new leadership at Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, they're going to have to make it up somewhere.

Minister, we have seen this sorry tale of house loans, kickbacks, money wasted on Harleys, on that speedboat—\$150 million a year of taxpayers' money—no transparency, no accountability and no oversight whatsoever. Now we hear of more cost overruns, a deficit and \$2 million in bonuses.

My question, Minister: Do you really know who's in charge of this file? You have not met with the new CEO, Andrew McCallum. You never did meet with the old CEO, Chris Mazza. We want to know: What is your plan, Minister? Are you hiding behind the sofa or just planning on sweeping this under the rug?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I just don't know where to start. Let me just clarify a few misconceptions.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, I told you I could hear you, and I do.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have met with Mr. McCallum. In fact, I've seen him earlier this week.

I tried to meet with Dr. Mazza, but he wouldn't come to the meeting.

You don't have to tell me—

Interjection: Who's in charge?

Interjections.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: And he was out of his job shortly thereafter. I buy that.

Speaker, the member is telling us something we all know: that things were not as they ought to have been at Ornge under the old leadership. We have made significant changes. The entire leadership team is new. The board has been entirely—

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The board has been entirely replaced. The new board is making significant efforts to recover some of the money that was inappropriately spent. We're looking forward to receiving \$1.1 million back, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: So things are back on track at Ornge. Patients are getting the care they need, and it will continue to improve as we go forward.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Acting Premier. Today, the mayor of Mississauga, like the mayor of Oakville, made it clear that it took an election to get the Liberal government to listen to Ontarians who didn't want the Mississauga gas plant. After seven years of telling them it was impossible to act, an election made it happen. Why did it take an election for you to correct your mistake?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be helpful if we looked at fully what Mayor Hazel McCallion said. She pointed out, and I quote, "I think all parties would have cancelled it. There's no question about it. In fact, I would say that the citizens were in touch with both the Conservatives and with the NDP; no question about it. They not only appealed to the Premier and to the present government; they definitely appealed to the Conservatives and the NDP. There's no question about it."

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bantering back and forth when I'm trying to listen is not helpful. I would ask the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek to resist the temptation.

Hon. John Milloy: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, all parties of this Legislature promised to cancel that plant. I think, again, Mr. Speaker, it's time that members of the opposition came forward to talk about their commitment, the policy analyses that they did, the costing that they did, because the fact of the matter is, this was a promise that was made by the opposition and it was kept by the government.

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

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My goodness. Going back, just a reminder that there was only one party in this Legislature that proposed to put it there in the first place.

The permit for the Mississauga plant wasn't issued until May 28, 2009, five years after the Minister of Energy signed the agreement for the Mississauga gas plant. Will the Acting Premier admit that the government bent over backwards for private power companies, but it took some bad election polling to get results for families in Mississauga?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let's take a little bit of a walk down memory lane. Mayor Burton, speaking about the Oakville power plant: "Would you like to

elaborate”—this is from my friend the member Mr. Delaney. “Would you like to elaborate particularly on the support Mr. Tabuns lent you in the drive to get the Oakville power plant cancelled?” Mayor Burton answered, “We enjoyed expressions of support from all parties, including Mr. Tabuns, and we appreciated the support of all parties.”

Mr. Speaker, what about Mississauga? What did the member from Toronto–Danforth tell Inside Toronto on September 26 when it came to the Mississauga power plant? “We wouldn’t build it.”

What about Etobicoke–Lakeshore NDP candidate Dionne Coley? According to Torstar News Service, September 16, she also pledged to fight the plant.

National Post, September 29: “... local NDP candidate, Anju Sikka, soon issued statements concurring with the new Liberal cancellation.”

Mr. Speaker, again: a promise made by them; a promise kept by us.

1100

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: This question is to the Minister of Rural Affairs. Building and maintaining infrastructure across the province is important. It drives our economy and improves the quality of life for all Ontarians.

Building and maintaining infrastructure is not just a concern of urban municipalities; it also matters in small towns and rural communities. The infrastructure needs in rural Ontario can very much differ from those in urban municipalities.

Constituents in my riding and in neighbouring rural communities have heard of the government’s Building Together plan. Can the Minister of Rural Affairs tell us what this government is doing to ensure that we continue to support the infrastructure needs of small towns and rural communities in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you much, Mr. Speaker. I’ll try to be a little calmer today.

I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans—a hard-working member. He had a wonderful career in the Ottawa area as an engineer, designing roads and bridges. He knows this file inside out.

As the member knows, a strong, healthy Ontario includes strong rural communities, which is why our government is committed to bringing their interests into focus. The new Municipal Infrastructure Strategy includes projects in virtually every municipality across Ontario, including most rural municipalities. There has been a great uptake. The province is making \$8.25 million available to 358 small, rural and northern municipalities in 2012-13, as well as providing \$750,000 in funding over the next three years for asset management planning to 37 consolidated municipal service managers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Back to the Minister of Rural Affairs: It is good to know that this government is seriously working to address the infrastructure needs of small towns and rural communities.

I know that investment in infrastructure has been unprecedented since 2003. There have been many improvements in communities across the province, and many critical infrastructure projects have been funded and are improving communities across the province.

The minister mentioned the Municipal Infrastructure Strategy. Can we hear more about this plan and what it will do to address the needs of small towns?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I’d like to refer this one to my good friend the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Our annual infrastructure investments now are a record in Ontario history. This year we will spend \$12.9 billion on infrastructure—about \$2.4 billion on highways in the north and rural Ontario. That contrasts to the party opposite that downloaded provincial highways onto them. As a matter of fact, this comes as very good news, particularly to the people in eastern Ontario, where the party opposite downloaded 42% of the responsibility. Some 42% of highways are now on the municipals, without additional solutions.

Our solution was to add \$90 million to help repair bridges and roads, in addition to the gas tax that supports transit in small communities like Orillia.

CASINOS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, if we learned anything from the meeting that the Premier had with OLG bosses yesterday, it’s that we now know you both owe this House an apology.

Twice this week, you and the Premier have said that there is no special casino deal for Toronto. The Premier said that the same formula applied to every community hosting a casino. Yet despite those repeated assurances, the Toronto Star reports today: “... Paul Godfrey, chair of Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., said the agency will formulate a new casino profit-sharing formula equal for all.”

Minister, if there was no special deal, why is OLG going back to the drawing board to come up with a new formula?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We are modernizing the OLG. We’re trying to do our utmost to generate more revenue to protect our services like health care, education and social services, and doing it in a socially responsible way. What we have before us is a formula that’s being used in the same format right across the province. We’ve made it clear that no municipality—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’m getting conversations from all sides, back and forth, and it has nothing to do with the question—and if it does, it shouldn’t be happening.

Finish, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

We've made it clear that there are no special deals for any one particular municipality. OLG is reviewing the formula to ensure that the principles of fairness and equality are done, and we want to make certain that all municipalities benefit from the restructuring and the modernization of our plan.

Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite: We are maintaining the same formula, and we are doing our utmost to ensure that all municipalities are treated fairly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Minister, it's clear that you and the Premier are in over your heads on this file. I repeat: You both assured, right here in this House, that the formula was the same for every municipality: "No special deals." That's what you said. Can you explain to the people of Ontario why the Premier and the finance minister have no clue what OLG was up to? Ontarians want to know who's in charge—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order. Second time.

Mr. Steve Clark: —the OLG, the international casinos? Because clearly you don't know.

Hon. Charles Sousa: What we do know is that we're modernizing the system, generating more employment and more jobs for the province of Ontario. We're trying to ensure that we get proper value for taxpayer dollars, and ensure that we increase those revenues for the benefit of the province. We also know that the decisions are ultimately made by the municipality. They're the ones that are going to decide. We're giving them the information. They now will decide if they wish to proceed to the next step, which is then to delve into the formula—delve into the hosting fees and what it is that they can generate—if they wish. That's where we're at, Mr. Speaker.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today, 60 people from my riding are here, and they're here because they're concerned about their access to health care. The departments of obstetrics, gynecology, pediatrics and mental health have started to move out of the Welland hospital and the Niagara Falls hospital into the St. Catharines hospital. Local doctors have warned that these changes will threaten the Welland hospital's ability to offer 24/7 care. Even though all the reports talk about the importance of maintaining a full acute-service site, years after bringing these issues forward the minister remains silent.

Why is the minister ignoring legitimate concerns of patients, residents and health care providers?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite, and welcome to the Legislature, people from Welland. I look forward to meeting with you after question period. I think it's important that members of communities are engaged in health care decisions; I

welcome the advocacy of groups such as are represented today.

However, it is important that we continue to improve health care services in Niagara. I know that people of Welland and people of Niagara are delighted with the new hospital in St. Catharines that is opening up access to care that was previously not available in Niagara. Things like cancer care, cardiac catheterization and longer-stay mental health services are now available in Niagara.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I look forward to the supplementary, to speak more specifically.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Residents in my community are sick of being ignored while their health care is threatened. Twenty thousand people have signed a petition in my riding to keep our services in Welland. Three years after the formal report was submitted, the minister has remained silent; there's been no response. I've already had emails and complaints from parents, as the pediatric program is moving, about access to health care in Welland for their children. They've already experienced mayhem when they've called an ambulance and the paramedic system didn't know that children were being admitted to St. Catharines as of a certain day. So parents are very concerned.

The Welland hospital is essential to the well-being of my community and our community, but we're watching as it's being dismantled. That's exactly what happened in Port Colborne and Fort Erie in past years. Is the minister planning to stand by, remain silent and allow this dismantling to continue?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can tell you is that every decision made in health care is made for the benefit of the people of the community. I can tell you, when it comes to maternal child care, there have been four separate external reviews of this decision. Each review was unanimous. One recent review included the CEO of Sick Kids hospital, and leaders of obstetrics and pediatrics. Speaker, this is a decision that is based on improving quality of care.

1110

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, second time, and the last. The next one's a warning.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yeah.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And whoever just did that—the member from Eglinton–Lawrence will come to order, and he will be warned as well, especially when I'm trying to get attention.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Community and Social Services, you'll have one more chance.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm waiting, Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I said, there were four separate reviews. In each of the four reviews, the external reviewers found that the new model is better for quality, better for safety and better for patient experience. We have no plans to reverse that decision.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. My constituents were encouraged by your update to the House recently on the progress being made with the review of the Condominium Act. They were especially pleased to read the report released on the findings of stage one of your consultations.

Minister, I've reached out to my constituents and encouraged them to provide feedback and comments on this report. Many of the condo owners in Scarborough–Rouge River have sent my office feedback on the report, which I have provided to your ministry. Can the minister please let us know what the next steps are and what will be happening with the comments that my constituents and others have provided to the ministry on the findings of the report from stage one?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: First, I want to thank my wonderful colleague from Scarborough–Rouge River for the question, and I want to thank all members of the House who have held or continue to hold town halls and information sessions for their constituents to provide feedback on the findings report from stage one on our condo review.

While the formal public comments have now closed, the ministry will continue to accept comments throughout the review, and I'm very happy to report today that we are officially launching stage two of the condo act review.

This morning, the stage two experts panel will meet for the first time. This expert panel is reviewing the findings report and the hundreds of comments that were generated in phase one. The expert panel will develop a report of options and recommendations to update the Condominium Act. Their options and recommendations report is expected to be available for public comment by the end of the summer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I'm excited to hear the progress that the ministry continues to make as it moves forward with this review of the Condominium Act. I am especially pleased with the number of opportunities available for public participation and submission of feedback through the process. With strong engagement of the public from the beginning of the process, I feel confident that the changes proposed to the Condominium Act will be accepted and that all stakeholders will be pleased with the solutions that will come from our review. However, my constituents have raised some questions regarding the expert panel which will be putting together the options and recommendations for the changes to the act. Can the minister please share with us more information on this expert panel?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm happy to report that I will be dropping in to meet the expert panel later today to thank them for the excellent work they will be undertaking in our collaborative review and very engaging process for the review of the Condominium Act.

This group of people has been brought together because they are technical experts. They have the knowledge and experience with the issues facing the condo sector today. They're knowledgeable and experienced in one or more of the following areas: condominium governance; dispute resolution; condominium finances; consumer protection; and condominium management. They represent the interests of a wide range of professional fields—legal, condominium management, consumer advocates and residents. They will be using the values and principles that were proposed by our residents' panel in phase one to report and guide their deliberations.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, this afternoon there will be a very important vote in this House on my private member's bill entitled the Sick Days are for Sick People Act. If passed into law, my bill would end the practice of paying out public sector employees for unused sick days. Our act would allow employees in the public sector to bank their sick days for use as actual sick days. This legislation would permit ill employees to use their sick leave to take time off, not only due to their own personal illness, but for their children or their immediate family members.

Minister, would you encourage your caucus to support our legislation that protects employees, protects employers and proactively addresses the future liability on the taxpayers of Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the member's question. As mentioned, the bill brought forward on sick days is something that's of concern for all of us. Certainly the Minister of Labour has introduced some legislation in order to provide some support for those families who are also dealing with situations when they're sick or when their children are sick, and we want to be able to accommodate them. We're also asking the federal government to participate in enabling some of those support systems so that everyone who needs support is receiving the support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, that sounds reassuring, but we're facing a \$30-billion deficit, and you have the responsibility for looking after every taxpayer dollar that's being spent in the public sector. You have to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just when I get things nice and quiet, I can count on the Attorney General to ramp it back up again—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And others on this side. Maybe I should start the clock.

Member.

Mr. John O'Toole: Speaker, this is an important issue. Even Don Drummond recognizes that many collective agreements offer generous retirement gratuities, especially to school employees, and then allow them to cash out unused sick days over the course of their career. At their retirement, they're cashing out. What's your response to that?

Now, here's some background. On average, about 20 sick days per year per employee, often ending up, at the end of their retirement, cashing out almost half a year's salary.

Minister, will you support—now, clearly—our legislation that ends the public sector practice of cashing out accumulated sick leave at retirement? Would you advise your caucus?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As noted, our government is committed to building a sustainable model for wage negotiations, and these are deals that are negotiated. These are systems that are in place. We recognize the concerns you've brought forward. That's why we're also addressing them.

What's important here is that we are negotiating, and we do have settlements and we have collective bargaining agreements that we adhere to. We recognize that the members opposite would rather do away with legislative and negotiated agreements, but that's not what we're about. We want results, and we want positive results, and that's what we're getting right now. We also want to ensure that those who need the support receive the support required, and we take your recommendations and note your positions.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs: Last week, the federal government began dismantling buildings at the world-renowned freshwater research station known as the Experimental Lakes Area. Ten days from now, the site is scheduled to close as a result of the federal Conservatives' war on science. Every time I have raised this issue in the House, the government has assured us that the province is opposed to the short-sighted and politically motivated decision.

My question is simple: What concrete steps is this government willing to take to prevent the closure of this important research facility?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I want to thank the member, first of all, for the question. It's a very important question. We're also, on this side of the House, concerned about this matter. In fact, Minister Bradley wrote to Minister Ashfield, the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and also wrote to Minister Kent, the Minister of the Environment, in this regard, in partnership with Gord Mackintosh, the Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship of Manitoba. So the Manitoba minister and

our minister have indicated the importance of this Experimental Lakes area to the province of Ontario.

The value that has been gained from the research in this particular area over the years is important, but clearly, as the member knows, this is a federal government responsibility. We have a memorandum of agreement with them, but this is fully funded by the federal government. It is their operation right now, and we're waiting to hear what they're going to be doing. They've indicated that they're preparing to withdraw. We know it's \$2 million to operate—

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

1120

Ms. Sarah Campbell: The fact of the matter is, writing one letter last year just doesn't cut it. People the world over are concerned about the fate of this very important research centre.

Yesterday, in the House of Commons, my federal New Democratic colleagues used an opposition day motion as an attempt to prevent this closure, but it was defeated by the Conservative majority, who are intent on muzzling scientists and ending research on the environment.

This issue cuts across party lines and has also been raised by leaders across Canada and across the world. It is not about partisan politics; it is about groundbreaking research. People are looking to this provincial government for action, not letter-writing—action.

I once again ask: What commitments will this government make to stop the closure of this facility and to keep it open?

Hon. David Oraziotti: Again, Speaker, I want to thank the member. Just to be clear, we're doing the exact same thing that the NDP government in Manitoba is doing and lobbying the Conservative government federally, so it's very important to us as well.

I want to say to the member, and you know full well, that the cost of cleanup in this area is approximately \$50 million. That's a liability that we don't want Ontario taxpayers paying for. However, saying that, we are prepared to work with any organization that's prepared to come forward. This has also been articulated by the federal government. We are reviewing the matter right now, and we're prepared to work with anyone to come forward and operate the Experimental Lakes. We think they have tremendous value.

We think it's extremely unfortunate that the federal government has made this decision. We want them to reverse this decision and fund this particular Experimental Lakes operation, but we're prepared to consider the options on this going forward.

I thank the member, as well, for contacting me and writing me a letter on this, and we will be getting back to the member.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the always inspirational Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

In my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, there are a lot of young people, and these young people have a lot on their plates, Speaker. They know that getting a job in Ontario's marketplace is very competitive. They also know that employers often prefer candidates with experience. While young Ontarians are working hard to finish school, they know that when they start looking for a job they might not have the skills or the experience that is necessary to compete for the jobs that they want.

We heard during the throne speech that the new Ontario government is going to focus on youth employment and that we're going to improve opportunities for Ontario's young people. Would the minister be able to inform the House what actions our government is taking to ensure that our young people have the experience they need to succeed?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, I'm not even going to thank the member after that introduction—but I'm pleased to answer the question.

The new Ontario government has put a high priority on helping students find a summer job, indeed on youth employment in general. For the last nine years, Mr. Speaker, our government has invested heavily in building an education system that the OECD ranks as the best in the English-speaking world, because we understand how vital it is to help our young people compete in this fiercely competitive global economy.

As important as education is, we also recognize that experience goes a very long way in ensuring that young people learn crucial job skills that they'll carry with them for the rest of their careers and the rest of their lives. That's why we've developed the Ontario Summer Jobs Strategy. Last year, this program helped more than 100,000 high school and post-secondary students find work and gain crucial on-the-job experience. I'll have more to say about that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister. It's clear that the minister shares my desire and the desire of all members of this House to see our youth succeed. Bringing down the youth unemployment rate is a priority for every member of this government.

I was glad to hear the minister mention the Ontario Summer Jobs Strategy. I know this program has been very successful in the past and that going forward, it will be a valuable resource for the young people of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and all Ontarians.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Would he be able to tell us about the future of the Ontario Summer Jobs Strategy and any updates that we could expect?

Interjection: That's a good question.

Hon. Brad Duguid: That is a good question.

Just yesterday, I was at Harbourfront Centre with three of my cabinet colleagues to launch this year's Summer Jobs Strategy. Part of our Summer Jobs Strategy is a program that offers employers a \$2 incentive to hire a student who's returning to school in the fall.

Summer jobs provide students with income they can use to offset their education costs, but they also provide

students with an invaluable real-work experience that makes them even more job-ready when they graduate.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland is going to have an option.

Hon. Brad Duguid: In these challenging economic times, in this competitive job market, we need to equip our youth as early as possible with on-the-job experience that will help them now and for the rest of their lives. This summer, I'm pleased to advise, we look forward to helping another 100,000 students find jobs across Ontario. I know all members are going to want to put this in their spring householders. For more information on this program, students can go to www.ontario.ca/summerjobs.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the finance minister. As you're well aware, we are saddled with a \$12-billion deficit and a debt per capita of \$20,000 for every man—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This is the moment in which some people get themselves in trouble, because when I start to get the quiet, that's when you think you're going to stick in your last shot. It's not going to happen.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Which the member just did.

Please finish.

Mr. Rob Leone: Yes, I know, Mr. Speaker; they're screaming because of embarrassment—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not helpful.

Mr. Rob Leone: Bill 26 being debated today, the Living Within Our Means Act, would require government to do what every responsible family across Ontario does with their lives, which is to live within their means. It says that the budget must be brought to balance by April 1, 2017, or the executive council will take a pay cut. It's a very reasonable approach, considering that Ontarians are the ones paying their salaries in the first place.

Minister, with all three parties expressing the need to bring our books into balance, can I count on your support for the Living Within Our Means Act this afternoon?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. I appreciate the concern that you're having, as well as the rest of this House, about the fiscal responsibility to balance our books by 2017-18. I also appreciate the fact that you're willing to help us in this next budget, because you should be approving this budget, because no one out there is anxious for an election at this point in time. We need to have some stability. We need to ensure that we have a good economic plan going forward.

Your private member's bill makes references, but it also talks about the rating agencies. Part of the problem is, you're limiting the opportunity for the government to achieve some of its results. We need to balance our books. We're looking forward to reducing our debt-to-

GDP, and we're going to do so with or without your support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Rob Leone: Minister, I have a quote from the Premier from the February 1 edition of the Toronto Star, and it reads: "It is obviously critical that we tackle the deficit and get to the point that we are paying down debt."

Minister, this is what the bill does. Based on your government's newfound religion on fiscal responsibility, you'd think you'd be jumping at the chance to support a bill that not only reduces the deficit but holds the government accountable, something you're saying is a priority for the government all of a sudden. Our province cannot afford another credit rating downgrade, and empty political promises will not prevent that.

Minister, will you commit today to make good on the Premier's pledge, bring some fiscal responsibility to our province and support the Living Within Our Means Act?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We're achieving positive results already. We're below our deficit targets for this year, and we're moving forward in a very positive way. We look to you to help us achieve those results, because the public is looking for that stability.

The point in your bill that creates some concern is the negative impact it would have and the additional pressure it would put on the province's credit rating because of the increased pressures that it would add. That's the only issue.

Otherwise, we're on the same page. We want to reduce our deficit, we want to ensure that the recovery of the economy continues, and we want to make certain that we take a balanced approach. I look to you not to promote slash-and-burn strategies that are going to have a negative impact on that recovery. We need to ensure that we do it positively and in a progressive manner.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Acting Premier. It has been over 30 years since the last revision of the mining health and safety act. The Ham Commission recommended that this act be reviewed and updated every two years to reflect changes in the mining industry. Since 1978, technology has evolved, but workers still face work-related injuries and deaths. Since 2007 alone, there have been 11 mining deaths in Ontario. Will the minister commit to the families of those injured workers to review and update the mining health and safety act in an open and transparent manner?

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will refer this to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Oraziotti: Thank you, Speaker, for the question, and I thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for raising what is obviously a very serious issue and an issue of great concern for all Ontarians. We are certainly concerned about this issue.

The review process that you're referring to: We are certainly considering and prepared to work with you on this. We think it's very important. We also recognize that when any individual in this province goes to work, the expectation is that they come home to their families at the end of the day. So I want to thank the member for raising this very important issue, and we're certainly prepared to work with you to make improvements that are necessary in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the minister for indicating that he's willing to work with us in order to get this accomplished.

In the past 30 years, we have seen an unprecedented increase in international ownership of mining sites. Ontario should be a leader in mining health and safety practices, but instead we are still stuck in the 1970s. The province owes it to the families of workers like Jason Chenier and Jordan Fram, in Sudbury, who were killed while working in a mine. And there are many more like them. The families have put together MINES—M-I-N-E-S—Mining Inquiry Needs Everyone's Support. That means everyone, specifically the minister's support.

Will the minister act now to ensure the mining health and safety act is evolving at the same pace as the industry so that workers are protected in Ontario mines?

Hon. David Oraziotti: Let me reiterate that on this side of the House—and I think it's certainly fair to say for all members—we're very concerned, and our condolences and our concerns go out to all the families that have been impacted by this type of tragedy anywhere in the province of Ontario. One workplace death is one too many in the province of Ontario.

I know that over the last number of years we have made investments in improving workplace safety, and we have been committed to working with our industry partners and unions across this province to help reduce those fatalities. I know that in my own community of Sault Ste. Marie the Steelworkers union has been very active on raising these issues and expressing their concern about how we need to, as a province, continue to work toward reducing workplace safety injuries. I think the member is certainly touching on an issue that everyone is concerned about. This is certainly a non-partisan issue, and we're committed to working with you to make Ontario safe—

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

GREENBELT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Greenbelt Act was proclaimed in 2005. It protects 1.8 million acres of land across the greater Golden Horseshoe. That's an area the size of Prince Edward Island. Many people in my riding of Oakville, and I think residents right throughout the province of Ontario, enjoy the recreational activities that the green-

belt offers, things from hiking to camping, fruit picking, even wine tasting. I believe the greenbelt is a testament to the vision that we can continue to grow in a sustainable way without having to surrender our countryside and open space to development and sprawl.

As we're approaching the first 10 years of the Greenbelt Act in 2015, would the minister please inform the House of the progress we've made to date and why Ontarians think it's so important to keep protecting this valuable resource?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I really want to thank the member for the question. Certainly, the greenbelt is a very large success story for our province. It's respected worldwide, and that's why it's won so many provincial and international awards for its establishment.

Protecting the green space in the Golden Horseshoe helps curb urban sprawl. It also improves our quality of life, and it preserves Ontario's natural heritage for our future generations.

This January, we expanded the greenbelt for the first time since it was created back in 2005. With the addition of the Glenorchy lands in Oakville, the total protected land in the greenbelt now is nearly two million acres across the greater Golden Horseshoe. In fact, a study released last May by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation shows that the total economic benefit and impact of the greenbelt associated activity province-wide exceeds \$9.1 billion annually. These additions to the greenbelt will allow us to continue to deliver the economic benefits to the region, and we look forward to continuing to protect Ontario's precious green space.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have very special guests in the Speaker's gallery, and I would be taking my life in my hands if I did not introduce them because one is my Aunt Ann, three other cousins, and my wife, Rosemarie. Welcome. I'm taking them to lunch. Pray for me.

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

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Rob Leone: I have a few people from Cambridge who are starting to make their way down to the members' gallery: Roy Broadbear, Jeff Mole, Kevin Street, Wes Mazur, Joe Farwell, Roy Hawkins, Ron Dancy and Bob Miller. My constituency assistants, Nicholas Woodfield and James Roy, will be joining us this afternoon, as well as the former member for Mississauga North, Terry Jones, who is making his way to the chamber. I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to welcome Councillor Jane Twinney from the town of Newmarket, who will be

joining us today. She is here to express her support for a private member's bill that I will be introducing just a bit later today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome her here.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise in this House today to voice my concerns about the new trades tax, on behalf of tradespeople across Parry Sound–Muskoka. On March 8, I joined with frustrated local tradespeople to sign the pledge to stop the trades tax. I was struck by just how great the frustration has become. One worker even took the time out of his workday to make the three-hour trip from Sudbury to attend the event and voice his concerns.

While there are many serious issues with the new tax, the fact that local tradespeople have been caught off guard by the new fees, which are soon to become mandatory, is most concerning. I was fortunate enough to hear from hairdressers, electricians, plumbers, mechanics and carpenters from across the riding, all opposed to the new tax, and to present petitions on their behalf in the Legislature. It is clear that the College of Trades does little to address our current skills shortage and will make it more difficult and more expensive to do business in the province of Ontario.

I stand with my colleagues in the Ontario PC caucus, committed to opposing this new tax that will undoubtedly have a negative impact on tradespeople and the economy across the province. I would also like to encourage people to visit stophetradestax.ca to learn more and to sign the petition.

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again I call on the government to do the right thing when it comes to what is the potential of the Ring of Fire. We have in Ontario one of the richest natural resources across the world, when it comes to chromite. We're talking about ore that's 50% to 60% pure when it comes to the chromite deposits there.

Not only do you have chromite; you have nickel, gold and other materials, and there's a huge opportunity here for Ontario to position itself as a manufacturer of stainless steel. Ontario and Canada are the only G8 countries that are not into the manufacturing of stainless steel in a major way, yet we control most of the natural resources. Why would Ontario, which controls the natural resources that are the component parts to make stainless steel, not take advantage of this—our competitive advantage? The ore is here in the ground. We can bring the ore to a site somewhere in Ontario—bring the iron ore in, bring the chromite in, bring the nickel matte in—and be able to process that into stainless steel.

Yes, it's going to take some doing. The private sector is interested in making those investments, but we need to have a provincial government that is prepared to do what it needs to do in order to facilitate those discussions so we can have it. Imagine if we get the stainless steel. That means literally thousands, if not in the tens of thousands, of jobs across the Ontario economy, everything from mining the ore in the Ring of Fire to the shipping on rail south somewhere, the processing of stainless steel. The finance jobs, the activity on the TSX is just incalculable. I call on this government to work with us, in order to position the Ring of Fire as a potential for making stainless steel in Ontario.

HEALTHY KIDS PANEL REPORT

Mr. Phil McNeely: Last week I met with two nurses, Una Ferguson and Cécile Diby from Orléans, representing the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, or RNAO. We discussed a number of things related to health in Ontario: the effects of poverty, the need for more and better social housing, and the modernization of health care. One thing I was encouraged by after this meeting was the greater role nurses are taking in health policy and research. Like our government, the RNAO's policy team is focused on creating a vibrant and healthy Ontario.

We also discussed the recently released Healthy Kids Panel report, co-chaired by Ottawa's own Alex Munter, CEO of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. The report correctly concludes that if Ontario's health care system is to be sustainable in the future, healthier lifestyles need to be a big part of the solution. The nurses agreed that when \$4.5 billion is spent treating preventable health conditions caused by obesity, like type 2 diabetes and heart disease, we as legislators and professionals must not stand idly by. The report shows that 75% of obese children go on to become obese adults. The best way of preventing these future health problems is to take aggressive action today.

The panel had three recommendations: starting all kids on the path to health from before birth and onward, creating healthy communities where kids can play and be active, and changing the food environment to help make it easier for kids and parents to choose healthy foods.

Their interest in this report was encouraging. Government can't solve these problems alone. We need an all-hands-on-deck approach that involves all parties, the private sector, non-profits and, most importantly, Ontario families.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: For two years now, citizens of Northumberland–Quinte West have voiced their concerns and pleaded with this government to not place wind turbines in their community. Since being elected, I have supported my constituents as they have attended

numerous meaningless public information sessions on proposed wind turbine farms.

I want to give credit to the Alliance for the Protection of the Northumberland Hills for their relentless efforts to mobilize constituents, create awareness and try to stop these problem-plagued windmills. I further want to acknowledge the township of Alnwick/Haldimand's recently adopted motions stating they do not support the approval of industrial wind farms within their community. Citizens have attended public meetings hoping their voices actually mattered, when in reality these meetings were, and will continue to be, just lip service.

Both I and my constituents were encouraged when the new Premier said that projects such as wind turbines would only go to willing host communities. Well, based on extensive local consultation, it is increasingly clear that communities within Northumberland–Quinte West are not willing hosts. A moratorium on wind turbines is long overdue. I insist that the Premier and the Minister of Rural Affairs stop saying they are going to listen to rural communities and actually listen to rural communities. Stand up for rural citizens and municipalities and issue the wind turbine moratorium immediately.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jonah Schein: On behalf of the constituents in Davenport, I'd like to congratulate the new Premier of Ontario. We all watched closely and many of us rooted for you to make history back in January at the old Maple Leaf Gardens. But most importantly, we were rooting for everyone in this province, because communities across Ontario are hurting and it's now time to move from conversations to concrete actions that will address the issues facing people in Ontario.

We are looking for signs that this new Premier understands the mistakes of the Liberal government. My constituents want you to acknowledge that your massive tax breaks for corporations have put the province out of balance, and you've left us with a revenue problem. We want you to admit that privatization of Ontario's energy sector and subsidization of the nuclear industry is the wrong choice for this province. We want you to recognize that your government has pushed unwanted casinos and dirty diesel trains on our communities, and acknowledge that your government's Bill 115 hurt workers and families. Show that you understand there are 600,000 people out of work and yet in 10 years your government has not made one single positive change to protect unemployed Ontarians.

It's time to change direction. I encourage you to work with our NDP caucus to close corporate tax loopholes, to make life more affordable, to support our jobs plan for youth, to move forward with a real plan to reduce poverty, reform social assistance and protect vulnerable workers, and to pursue a balanced economic approach that provides the revenue we need to make investments in our public institutions and in clean, green public transit. Please recognize the mistakes your government has made

and work with all MPPs to pursue a new path of fairness for the people of Ontario.

1310

KIDNEY HEALTH MONTH

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the month of March as Kidney Health Month in Canada. March 14 was marked as World Kidney Day.

An estimated 1.5 million Ontarians have or are at increased risk for developing chronic kidney disease. Recent studies show that chronic kidney disease patients who receive early guidance and dialysis treatment have a significantly lower risk of death.

During this Kidney Health Month, I wish to acknowledge the leadership role, in promoting prevention and awareness, of the Ontario Renal Network, the Kidney Foundation of Canada and other renal partners who are providing care, and a global leader based in my riding, Baxter Canada.

I'm proud to be a part of the government that is working to promote prevention and improving access to and the quality of renal care across the province. I would like to encourage all members of this House to raise awareness about the importance of kidney health in their communities.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to start by telling people in this House that Durham region is the home to the once-famous Windfields Farm racetrack and breeding farm, home to Northern Dancer, one of the most prized horses ever in Canada—in North America—and also a very well developed equine industry throughout all phases of standardbred horses, training, saddlery, you name it, as well as quarter horses at Picov Downs.

But what's most disheartening is that March 30 will be the last race day at Kawartha Downs near Peterborough. Many of the participants there from my riding of Durham and elsewhere are going to be disappointed. This means the loss of 800 local jobs and the end of a 40-year tradition. It is a direct result of an intervention by Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne's government in ignoring rural Ontario with the abrupt cancellation—without notice or debate—of the Slots at Racetracks Program, this government's cancellation of a partnership that worked. It created 60,000 jobs in rural Ontario and provided \$2 billion a year in revenue to the province of Ontario to help health care, to help education.

Durham riding is proud to be the home of racing industry leaders such as Glenn Van Camp, owner and breeder of San Pail, the top standardbred horse in the world. It's also home to Tara Hills, the top breeding farm in Canada, now cancelled.

It's a shame what they've done to the industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just a reminder to all members—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Rural Affairs will come to order, and when I'm standing, nothing happens.

A reminder to all members that we refer to each other either by their riding or by their title. It removes the downward spiral of being negative to each other.

I will now entertain the next statement.

PASSOVER

Mr. Mike Colle: On Monday night, many of my constituents in the beautiful riding of Eglinton–Lawrence, in the heart of the city of Toronto, and many members of the Jewish faith all over the world will be celebrating the holiday of Passover.

Passover is the time to remember and commemorate the liberation of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. The ancient story of the exodus from Egypt, which explains how the Israelites achieved their freedom from slavery, is one that Ontarians of all faiths can still appreciate today.

On Passover, families gather for their Seder dinner, where they retell the exodus from Egypt to their children and grandchildren and pass down the spirit of liberation and hope for a better future.

The foods eaten during the Seder symbolize slavery and freedom, such as matzo, an unleavened flatbread which symbolizes the bread that the Israelites made very quickly while fleeing Egypt, because they didn't have time for it to rise. There are many other wonderful foods that are served, like horseradish, maror and haroset, apples and nuts.

Anyway, it's a time to remember and reflect. I want to wish the entire Jewish community across Ontario a very healthy, happy and meaningful Passover with lots of gefilte fish, chicken soup and many, many matzo balls.

I say to all my Jewish friends and constituents, Chag Sameach.

NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to rise today and announce that March is also National Nutrition Month. The theme is: Eat Right, Your Way, Every Day. It's to take into account that your lifestyle has choices in the way you eat. Your ethnicity is the way you eat, and how you prove yourself to your children is the way you eat. You want to ensure that no matter where you come from, you're making healthy choices every day, because if we do not start by improving our eating choices when we're young, middle-aged or old, our health care system will continue to be burdened by disease and illness which should be and can be avoided with proper nutrition.

On behalf of the dietitians of this province, the moms who pack our lunches, the dads who buy us pizza on a Friday night, I want to say, thank you very much. Keep nutrition in mind. It is very important that, from this day forward, starting in March, we plan our nutrition appropriately.

I know as MPPs in this House, our eating habits are horrible, and I think we should all get together and somehow provide that our receptions at night are healthy choices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think that begs a response. I'm sure that dads do serve healthy pizza on Fridays, and I thank the member for his statement.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the House today, as is the custom of the Speaker to announce visitors who were once here on a professional level, we have with us, in the members' gallery, from Mississauga North the former MPP Terry Jones in the 30th, 31st and 32nd Parliaments. Thank you for being with us. Welcome.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PRESERVING EXISTING COMMUNITIES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À PRÉSERVER LES COLLECTIVITÉS EXISTANTES

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 35, An Act to amend the Places to Grow Act, 2005 with respect to the finality of certain municipal planning decisions / Projet de loi 35, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2005 sur les zones de croissance en ce qui concerne le caractère définitif de certaines décisions prises au niveau municipal en matière d'aménagement.

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): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Frank Klees: From time to time, legislation that's passed in this House has unintended consequences, and when that comes to light, I believe it's our responsibility to amend that legislation to ensure that it serves the public interest.

The Places to Grow Act, 2005, and its companion legislation, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, is an example of that, and, specifically, with regard to the direction of intensification of new growth to existing built-up areas. Often, even though local municipalities would deny that application that would impact the character, the quality of life and the property values of existing neighbourhoods—are overturned. Because of the way the existing provincial legislation is written, that decision by the local council is often overturned by the Ontario Municipal Board.

The legislation before us would amend the Places to Grow Act to ensure that local municipalities are empowered to make those decisions concerning their local

neighbourhoods and that that decision, once made by the municipality, may not be referred to the OMB.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm very pleased that you memorized the explanatory note. That was a really good job. I appreciate that.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, it's from the heart.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): From the heart and the explanatory note—I'm going to help you there.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries. Yes, the Minister of—I've got to get this one right. I know it's there.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'm not going to tell you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Citizenship.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, it's with mixed feelings that I rise to remind my colleagues that today is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I say "with mixed feelings" because I know that we all agree that in a perfect world, we shouldn't need such a day. However, this is not a perfect world.

On the other hand, the fact is that we have this day because we care about it and honour it all around the globe, and it's a sign that we are making progress.

In fact, as an African-Canadian, a son of immigrants here in Ontario, a proud member of this provincial assembly and a cabinet minister—the fact that I'm standing here today says a lot. It says that we are making progress.

As many of my colleagues will know, the United Nations chose March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination because it marks the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. On that day 53 years ago, police opened fire on a peaceful crowd demonstrating against apartheid law, and 69 people died that day.

The effects of racism, based on one's colour, continue to be felt around the world. One of the leading philosophers of the 20th century, Abraham Heschel, once observed that "Racism is man's gravest threat to man—the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason." We must eliminate that threat once and for all.

The theme for this year's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is Racism and Sport. Racism is sprinkled throughout the history of sports, but today the sports world is playing a bigger role than ever in ending racism. Athletes are role models who have tremendous influence with young people. Imagine the progress that we could make if every star athlete publicly pledged to make sport racism-free.

We're not there yet. Last year, an African-Canadian hockey player named Joel Ward was subject to racist tweets after scoring an overtime goal for his team. If this is what today's racialized athletes have to face, one can only imagine what Herb Carnegie must have gone through in the 1940s as one of the best talents who never had a chance to play in the NHL.

We're not there yet, but we are making progress. It's worth noting that one of the top scorers of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Nazem Kadri, is one of the first Muslims to play in the NHL, and I'm very proud of his record.

On this day I call everyone in this House to consider how far we've come on fighting racism and how far we have left to go. We are men and women of influence in this chamber. We represent a province that is a model of civility and diversity, but even in Ontario, racism still exists. Let us all work together every day until it is no longer true. Let us publicly pledge to do our best to make this House and this province racism-free.

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

I apologize to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for fumbling his title, and I thank you for your statement.

It is now time for responses.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for his heartfelt thoughts.

I'm honoured to rise today on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party and to speak to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The theme of this year's event is Racism and Sport. The hope is to address both the problem of racism and racial discrimination in sports, and the positive role that sports can play in tackling those very issues. Sport, at its best, is often about putting individual competition second to teamwork, and team sports, by their nature, foster the values of respect, co-operation and fair play. Whether it's an international event like the Olympics or the Pan Am Games or local extracurricular activities, well-designed sports programs can help integrate marginalized groups, and they can do so in a way that dispels petty conflicts and inherited resentments. So this is an appropriate theme.

I would also say that this sunny weather we are enjoying today, which has changed—touch wood—is somehow appropriate to this occasion. On a sunny day, 53 years ago, March 21, 1960, on the other side of the world, it was unusually hot. On that day, people gathered peacefully in the streets of Sharpeville, South Africa, to make their voices heard. There were students and workers, expectant mothers and children. They were citizens. They were gathered in the streets of Sharpeville because, although they were citizens, they were not equal because they were black South Africans. In apartheid South Africa, they were forced to carry passbooks. This was a sort of in-country passport used to restrict the movement of black South Africans over age 16 in areas that were designated white-only.

The protesters were rightfully upset, but because they were lifted up by the energy of community and shared purpose, the day had an almost joyous air. People sang hymns and freedom songs. They had gathered in the morning outside the Sharpeville police compound. As the day wore on and the sun bore down, their numbers dwindled, but many remained because they were so committed to the principle of equality.

They were also deeply committed to peaceful protest. But around 3 p.m., all of that came to an end. Without warning, the police opened fire on the crowd with machine guns. In all, 69 were killed; hundreds more were injured. Most suffered bullet wounds in their backs. There were people running for their lives.

Shortly after the gunfire stopped, it began to rain, building to a thunderstorm. The downpour would wash away the blood, but not the stain. The Sharpeville massacre marked the beginning of apartheid's most brutal chapter. It shocked the world and led the United Nations to create the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In doing so, the UN called on the international community to intensify efforts to eliminate racial discrimination in all forms.

Apartheid was discarded in 1994. Racism is not dismantled so easily. Racism doesn't need razor wire, machine guns, armoured cars or passbooks to exist. It can reside in political and business institutions. It can reside in organizational structures and legislation. It can reside in individual and collective mindsets.

So the task of conquering racism and racial inequality requires that we address both the public policies and private attitudes that perpetuate it. By "we," I mean all of us. All people need to engage with this issue in a meaningful way, to have difficult, frank discussions about this subject and to work toward real solutions.

In 1960, the world had very different attitudes than it does today. Racist laws and practices have since been abolished in many countries. The United Nations has constructed an international framework for combatting racism. But for all that progress, too many communities are divided and too many societies suffer under the dead weight of racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination robs afflicted societies of intellectual and creative life. It dampens the spirit of innovation, and it betrays the basic promise of freedom and dignity that all people should enjoy.

I hope that all of us here and those looking on will rededicate ourselves to this cause and recognize that if we are going to live in a better world, then we all have to take ownership for that task.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am very honoured to rise today to share my thoughts on today's special day. Today marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and it is a time for us to reflect on the horrible massacre that my colleagues have mentioned that occurred March 21, 1960, in South Africa. But it's also important to recognize that racial discrimination continues to exist today and it exists here in Canada.

One of the key things to recognize when it comes to the elimination of racial discrimination is that there are

three areas in which racial discrimination continues to exist and continues to plague our society. We must look at it in three areas: the justice system, education and employment.

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With respect to the justice system, there's a very powerful book written by Professor David Tanovich entitled *The Colour of Justice*, and Professor Tanovich boldly states in this book that "The colour of justice in Canada is white." Justice Iacobucci, once a justice for the Supreme Court of Canada, indicates that systemic racism toward natives in the justice system exists—and it's very clear that systemic racism exists across the board for racialized communities. In fact, it's well known that African-Canadians and many other racialized communities are far overrepresented in prisons and they have a disproportionate number of contacts with police. This speaks to a systemic racism that exists in our police forces. It's not an example of a bad apple. Though our police forces try their best to do a good job, there is a reality that a culture of racism exists and needs to be addressed.

When it comes to the elimination of racial discrimination, we must address the realities, and the realities are that all people, regardless of their skin, must be treated in a fair and equitable manner. When it comes to addressing the root causes of racial discrimination, we must address the reality that there is unequal access to opportunity for folks who are racialized.

If we look at education and employment, disparate levels of access to education and to resources result in poverty, and poverty is one of the root causes of discrimination. Racial discrimination, at its root, is a question of power. When there is a power imbalance, there will be discrimination. If we want to eliminate discrimination and racism, we need to eliminate the power imbalance which perpetuates this racism. When it comes to education and employment, addressing or redressing this problem by creating equal opportunities for access to education, equal opportunities for access to resources will be a step in the right direction to addressing the issue of racial discrimination.

When it comes to employment, just today the *Toronto Star* released some facts and figures regarding employment indicating that racialized Canadians make far less than white Canadians. It's a reality and we must address this. In fact, racialized Canadians make approximately \$30,000, compared to \$37,000, almost \$40,000 for other Canadians.

The situation is much worse if you're a first-generation male. When compounded by gender, immigrant women are in some of the worst conditions, and it's directly related to the reality of poverty. If you are racialized and you're a woman, you're more likely to be impoverished and you're more vulnerable to discrimination.

Again, to address this, we must look at the root causes. Racial discrimination is not only a prejudicial viewpoint but also is a systemic power imbalance. To address that,

we have to have policies that look at ways to combat this power imbalance, and one of the ways I've indicated is creating accessible opportunities for education.

It also requires us to look at the spheres of influence. Racialized communities are far under-represented in the spheres of power. Whether it is the public sector or the private sector, if you look at CEOs, if you look at partners in law firms, they are far under-represented when it comes to racialized communities.

If you look at the politics of representation, our young children growing up need to see other people who are successful for them to envision themselves in positions of power or to envision themselves as being successful. So our teachers, our principals also need to reflect the communities they represent. That's another area where we need to work on creating the representational aspect of having community members represented in their schools and in professions so that young people can see themselves achieving the success.

Again, if we are truly committed to addressing this problem, we need to address the root causes. The root causes are not only a viewpoint or a culture or a mentality, but also a systemic problem of power, inequality and an imbalance. Only when we address this imbalance of power can we really eliminate racism.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we move to petitions from Durham—I mean, petitions—I do want to bring this to your attention, even though I'm sure that this will be heard. There's a gentleman who is receiving a very milestone moment, who is celebrating a birthday this weekend, who is going to be solidifying being the oldest elected member in this chamber. The member from York Centre, Mr. Monte Kwinter, will be having a birthday, so I thought I'd just announce that so it's on the record.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know we gave that a lot of time the other day because he has had so many milestones, because every minute he lives, he sets another record.

Anyway, it's now time for—oh, wait. I have a point of order from the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent of this House to bring in a birthday cake for whenever Monte Kwinter's birthday is.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Unanimous consent has been asked for a birthday cake to be delivered for when Mr. Kwinter would be best appropriately receiving this. Do I hear a no? I think I've heard a no, so I'm going to have to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think I heard a no.

It's now time—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've lost control. Jocularly, jocularly.
The member from Durham for petitions.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: It is an honour to present petitions on behalf of my constituency today. All members appreciate that.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal" itself "has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients" who already 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 Kathleen Wynne government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've let it finish, but I do remind the member again, because he was the offending member before, that we're not going to use personal names, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: The Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That's a better improvement.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if you will indulge me just for a second before I read the petition. I have here the names of 15,000 people who have signed the petition, and I have the three people here in the gallery who have helped to collect all of these: Mr. Dean Wills, Ms. Barbara Nielsen, and her husband, Lars Nielsen.

For those of you who have been around the House a long time, you may remember Mr. Wills. He was one of the interpreters for MPP Gary Malkowski, and was actually one of the strangers in the House who was allowed on the floor. He is here as well today.

The petitions are many and varied. We have consulted with the Clerk and we have a statement to make instead of reading them all.

We have received over 15,000 signatures from Ontarians who are concerned about the condition of animals who are bred in puppy mills across the province.

The Legislative Assembly is asked to do what it can to shut down these puppy mills in order to protect the health and well-being of innocent animals, including but not limited to the regulating of sales, animal rights in breeding facilities, and by fostering public awareness.

I have about 14,000 of these signatures, and I would require a couple of pages to deliver them to the Clerks. Thank you very much.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by over 2,000 of my residents in Oxford county.

"Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for all future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

"Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require" landfill disposal.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to present the petition and I affix my signature.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm pleased to add my voice to the member from Beaches–East York and again deliver even more signatures of the over 15,000 signatures from Ontarians who are concerned about the condition of animals who are bred in puppy mills across the province. The Legislative Assembly is asked to do what it can to shut down these puppy mills in order to protect the health

and well-being of innocent animals. That could include regulating sales, animal rights and breeding facilities, and fostering public awareness.

I'm pleased to add my signature and to give it to the wonderful page Nadim to be delivered to the table.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Rob Leone: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current debt in Ontario is over \$250 billion, and is currently close to 40% of GDP; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has made a clear commitment to the Legislature that the budget will be balanced; and

"Whereas it is imperative that government lead by example when it comes to fiscal responsibility and incur real consequences for a failure to meet their goals;

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

"Support Bill 26, Living Within Our Means Act, 2013, and hold the government to account for its promises to balance the budget, with a failure to do so resulting in salary reduction for cabinet ministers. Furthermore, establish a new structure that caps our debt at 50% of total GDP."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and hand it over to page Kyara.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until an independent 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 industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

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

"That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies on the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines, their effect on the environment, the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled."

I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I'll affix my name to it.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario puppy and kitten mills deprive animals of proper care by confining them to inhumanely small cages without access to play, feeding them contaminated food and water, forcing puppies and kittens to breed, inflicting a wide array of cruelty, including amputation, execution and withholding of veterinary care;

"Whereas there are an estimated 100 such mills in Ontario;

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

"Ban the sale of puppy mill puppies and kittens in pet stores' retail outlets and via their websites."

I affix my signature.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario has closed historic jails in Walkerton and other rural Ontario municipalities resulting in loss of employment and heritage buildings to be vacated; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario is committed to job creation and economic development in rural Ontario communities and the preservation of heritage resources; and

"Whereas the provincial Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services has indicated a desire to establish a provincial correctional museum and memorial to showcase the history, heritage and legacy of our correctional institutions;

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

"That the Liberal government support the establishment of the Province of Ontario Correctional Museum in the historic 1866 Bruce County jail in Walkerton and instruct the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, to begin discussions with the municipality of Brockton."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature, and I'll give it to page Dasha.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the province of Ontario is the only province in Canada that does not allow the provincial Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities; and

"Whereas the people wronged by these institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn for help to address their issues;

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

“To grant the Ombudsman of Ontario the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children’s aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities.”

I support this, will affix my signature and will give this to page Arveen to deliver to the table.

JUNK FOODS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I have over 500 signatures on this particular petition.

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association is lobbying for the introduction of graphic warnings, restrictive marketing, and higher taxes on junk foods;

“Whereas the introduction of such measures would constitute an undue burden on the working poor and middle class;

“Whereas such measures would severely limit the ability of small and independent business to compete against larger, more well-funded corporations;

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

“Prevent the implementation of graphic warning labels, restricted marketing, and high tax on junk foods.”

I present this petition to page Eric.

STITTSVILLE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I have a petition from constituents in my riding. There are 1,446 signatures on this petition, and I will read it.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas currently, there is not an Ottawa-Carleton District School Board public high school in the town of Stittsville; and

“Whereas the population of Stittsville is expected to grow to over 70,000 residents by 2025; and

“Whereas an Ottawa-Carleton District School Board public high school is required in Stittsville to meet the need of students now;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately provide the funding required to build an Ottawa-Carleton District School Board public high school in Stittsville.”

I give this petition to page Ali.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, we have received over 15,000 signatures from Ontarians who are concerned about the condition of animals that are bred in puppy mills across the province. The Legislative Assembly is asked to do what it can to shut down these puppy mills, in order to protect the health and well-being of innocent animals.

I affix my signature to the petition.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

SICK DAYS ARE FOR SICK PEOPLE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RÉSERVANT LES JOURNÉES DE CONGÉ DE MALADIE AUX PERSONNES MALADES

Mr. O’Toole moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 25, An Act governing sick days in the broader public sector / Projet de loi 25, Loi régissant les journées de congé de maladie dans le secteur parapublic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. John O’Toole: Mr. Speaker, you mean I only have 12 minutes? This is a convincing argument that I have to make here, and that’s a limited amount of time.

It’s an important time in Ontario, if you look at the context of my bill. Recently, we had a report on the economy of Ontario by a very well-respected economist, Mr. Don Drummond. Mr. Drummond was Paul Martin’s Deputy Minister of Finance in Ottawa—one of the best finance ministers Canada has had. He then went on to become the chief economist for TD Bank. Premier McGuinty had asked him for some advice on how to bring things under control in Ontario. He came up with a very comprehensive report on providing public sector services, with some 300 recommendations, none of which have been respected by Premier McGuinty and now Premier Wynne.

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The point of Bill 25 is quite specific and very focused, and an immediate savings of revenue and risk to the province of Ontario. For the viewers at home, I’m going to make this a very reasoned and focused discussion, not about the jobs and the economy of Ontario, which are in an absolutely frightening state.

Our third-largest expenditure in the \$120-billion budget—Mr. Speaker, you probably know this—is the interest payments on the debt. That should put on a frame that says we have a problem, Houston. Let’s get on with it. My bill addresses a very specific action that can be taken—and I raised a question with the Minister of Finance today, and he virtually agreed with me. I think you can check Hansard. He sort of said he would encourage the members of their caucus to support Bill 25, a very small, meaningful, sensitive bill.

I’m going to read the instructions on the bill itself. I’ve had a hand in developing this bill—not all the hands; there have been some other people who worked harder on it than I did. But the bill is the Sick Days are for Sick People Act, 2013. Here’s what it says in the explanatory note, in the limited time here:

“Under the act, public sector employers are not permitted to compensate employees for unused sick days”—

pretty straightforward. “An exception is provided for individuals who are employed by a public sector employer on the day the act comes into force, as long as they continue to be employed by that employer.

“Public sector employers are not permitted to allow employees to use any unused sick days except when the employee is sick or is caring for a sick family member,” like a child or a loved one. Very clear.

In most cases in the public sector, they get a day or two per month—it could be 20 days a year—that they’re entitled to as sick leave. Traditionally, they have been able to accumulate that. That continues. The issue is being compensated on retirement for any unused sick days; that’s the real issue.

The final portion here is important.

There’s a retroactivity provision in the bill, and that allows people who are in employ today to retain the entitlement of their sick days.

“If an employee of a public sector employer uses a sick day but does not, if required, provide sufficient evidence of sickness in accordance with the regulations, the employee must repay any compensation received from the employer” in respect to that day that’s being questioned. “Regulations may be made governing the furnishing of evidence of sickness, including when it is required and what constitutes sufficient evidence in different circumstances” that would be described.

Like all bills it’s not very large, but it does have a very specific focus, and I think that’s what I’m trying to achieve here today.

I have looked around in other jurisdictions on how they’re handling this, and it’s always good to recognize that no one operates in isolation. I think a good comparator—I worked in personnel for a very large company for about 10 to 15 years, I guess, for General Motors Canada. In that time, we did look at repetitive absences. In fairness, it was governed by the CAW; it was mostly contract. On the salary side, they were non-unionized. And on appraisals—appraisals were annual—those were always taken into consideration: being late, actually being at work and all those kinds of things. Attendance is very important, especially in an environment where other people are depending on you being there. Mr. Speaker, if you weren’t here today, we would have to substitute for that. This is what I’m saying: It’s a practical thing.

Now, let’s be very clear. If someone is ill, I believe they should be entitled to whatever their collective agreement said. So in that respect, nothing is really being removed from someone; it’s trying to get rid of this predictable misuse of the entitlement itself.

I’m asking members to look at it as not a bill that is going to change the world, but it certainly will do two things. It will protect employees, employers and, most importantly, the taxpayers of Ontario. They’re the silent voices in all of this.

There are entitlements that people earn through collective bargaining, and I respect that process. They have to be realistic. We look at certain settlements that are made out of the context of the ability to pay; this is where

we start to run into a problem. If you want any more evidence, all you have to do is look at what’s going on in Greece, in Cyprus. It’s a reality, Mr. Speaker, in fairness.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has put several—in fact, I think there are 12 papers—more recently the one on agriculture. These papers that are put on the table for the Premier and cabinet to look at are making very fundamental recommendations; and I believe Ms. Horwath put some papers on the table as well.

I would hope that we’re all aiming at trying to eliminate waste in government—waste of taxpayers’ money. But when I go to the committees today, I hear about Ornge and the scandalous waste of money. I hear it in the gas plant fiasco that’s going on. It’s in that context that this is a small bill. I think it will signal whether or not the government is serious about addressing this abuse of absenteeism.

As I’ve said, I’ve looked at other provinces and there’s a variety of solutions. I’ve also looked at legal decisions with respect to the potential risks here. There’s quite a good paper by Bill Bransford, “How to Fight Sick Leave Abuse.”

Now, there’s a general appreciation in personnel generally and labour relations that three days is generally recognized as, I would say, more or less the maximum that you could be questioned—after that, there’s an expectation today, whether it’s in writing or just the practical way people work, that you would have a doctor’s note. I’ve always believed that if you’re sick, you should be—“Where were you?” “In the hospital.” Do you understand? I worked 31 years at General Motors, and I think I had a total of 10 days off in 31 years. It’s not 20 days a year automatically, but if someone has cancer, I think they should be covered. Do you understand? This “I’m not feeling well on Friday afternoon”—I don’t go for it; or Monday morning. I don’t go for that at all—not at all. I think there’s way too much casualness about that, and that’s the structure that I’m trying to put in place here. If you’re ill, this bill says it in four or five words, “Sick leave is for people who are actually ill.”

There are other leaves that are entitlements, whether it’s family leave or—there’s a bill before the Legislature that deals with things like that. So that’s the bill—this lawyer’s letter that I’m reading here says a couple of things.

“When an employee is out on an unscheduled absence claiming an entitlement to sick leave because of incapacitation, the manager must usually grant the sick leave if the employee self-certifies for an absence of three days or less.” That’s the person who says, “I was sick.” Now, if that’s happening every week—wait a minute here; maybe you have a bigger problem. There could be substance abuse problems. There could be other reasons explaining—and that employee should self-certify with a cause. That’s kind of what I’m saying.

But keep in mind that the employer in Ontario, whether it’s at the municipality level, a college, a university, a hospital or here at Queen’s Park, is the taxpayer of Ontario. All the money we get comes from someone else’s pocket.

I've looked at this, Mr. Speaker, from the point of view of some of the entitlements today. This is a very small one. It does recognize the accumulated sick leave of people today. It's not targeted to any one group or other. These are managers—anyone in the public sector is my point. I ask, respectfully, for the members to listen. I see a previous Minister of Labour here. I would expect him to support it. In fact, I would hope he speaks to it. So I'm asking, with the greatest degree of humility that I'm used to, to look at it.

There's lots of literature on this. This is a paper that I have here; it's from Alberta. It says, "New to the workplace? Learn about Alberta's workplace rules." I think these are reasonable rules. I went through this document. It's about 30 pages. It's on young employees. I think perhaps in our schools today—children are expected to be in attendance. It's a good learning area for people, and if they're ill, they should be covered and perhaps we should help them to catch up when they come back three or four days later.

1400

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the members of all parties to look at this in a non-partisan way and keep one thing in mind: Who is the person paying the bill?

I see the pages here, all young, grade 8—they're going to be here for the end of this week and next week. It's too bad you don't get longer than two weeks, because it's a great place where members try to solve problems, large and small. This is one of those small problems that we're putting on the table. It's an unusual little name for the bill, but nonetheless, if you look—An Act governing sick days in the broader public sector—it's pretty straightforward, and what it's trying to do is respect the people who have accumulated entitlements, and set the rules for new people.

I would say, quite frankly, that the other challenging issue in the public sector today is pensions. All pensions are in deficit—every single one. That should be addressed by—not retroactively, not at all. Going forward, you'll move from a defined benefit today to a defined contribution plan, the same as provincial members have.

So, with those remarks, I ask for your indulgence and for your support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: With the greatest respect, there's no way I'm going to vote for this bill—my God, no way.

I'm just amazed as I listen to the Conservatives in this House espouse what it is that they want to do coming up to whenever the next election is. It's all about whacking the little guy. They're really good at saying, "Let's find a way to whack the little guy and let the guy on the top get more." Because when the guy on the top gets more, the little guy is going to get trickled on. Well, I come from a place that when you get trickled on, it doesn't feel warm and fuzzy; it feels wet and cold.

I say to my friends in the Conservative caucus: My God, would you one day stand in this House and say,

"We understand that the working people in this province and those people who go to work every day have a tough time, and sometimes, yes, they decide that they're going to join a union"? They join what's called a—say it with me, the word "union." They join unions, and then they go off and they bargain collective agreements.

Sometimes, the employer is in a position where the employer doesn't have a lot of money to put into the collective agreement. You know; you worked for GM. Often, the employer goes to the table and says, "Listen, I hear you. I'd love to give you more money, but I'm not making any, so can we do some non-monetary things as a way of getting through this collective agreement, to try to get something so that you feel as if you got something out of the bargaining?" At times, employers have said, "Okay, I'll give you an extra floater." For those people who don't know the term, it's an extra unpaid day off a year. Sometimes the employer says, "Well, you have to wait five or six years to get three weeks of holidays. Maybe we'll give you a little bit more holidays." And, yes, sometimes they say, "Maybe we'll give you some more sick days"—because not everybody out there uses their sick days.

For the Conservatives to come in here all of a sudden and put the boots to the workers and say, "If you happen to negotiate something, we're going to make sure that the laws of this land don't allow you to bargain in good faith with your employers"—it's not the right thing to do. It is draconian. It is the Conservative way of doing things: "Whack the little guy; help the big guy. The big guy needs more." "Is he rich?" "No, he's not rich enough. Give him more."

I want people to make money. I want people to be rich. That's a good thing. But I want social responsibility. I want the people at the top of the companies out there, when it comes to working with the people of this province, to understand that they have a responsibility to treat workers fairly. That's what bargaining is all about.

So I say to my friend, sorry, I am not going to support this legislation, and I actually encourage people to vote against it, because this is an intrusion into bargaining. It's yet again the Conservatives showing clearly whose side they're on. They're on the side of the big guys, and they're against the workers, and that's something that I cannot stand for.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I'm delighted to join the debate. I have to congratulate the member for bringing this to the House. It's a private member's bill, and I have to say that probably he had some good intentions bringing forth this particular bill. I'm not trying to demean the title of the bill itself, but I have two particular problems, not with the intent that the member from Durham brought this bill, but with the content and the heading. Anyone who sees we are dealing with a bill, the Sick Days are for Sick People Act, must be wondering what the heck this is.

The member is quite correct: The bill is very small. It's got three short paragraphs, Speaker. I have no prob-

lem with the first. I have no problem with the second. My problem is with the third, and I'm going to read it for the benefit of the House and for the benefit of the people listening out there. I'm sure that the member did not address this particular paragraph, and this is the crux of the bill itself.

It says, "If an employee of a public sector employer uses a sick day but does not, if required, provide sufficient evidence of sickness in accordance with the regulations, the employee must repay any compensation received from the employer in respect of the sick day," meaning that we are not trusting our employees, that they are, in other words, just flouting—

Interjection.

Hon. Mario Sergio: This is in writing, my friend. This is in writing. This is in the bill. When we put this in writing, we are sending a terrible message that our people are frauds, that our people are defrauding the public purse, and I think we—

Interjection.

Hon. Mario Sergio: It's right in the bill.

But, Speaker, let me say this: One thing the bill does not address—and I hope the member is listening—is it doesn't say that this pertains to existing agreements already or future contracts. It does not say that. Otherwise, how can we, as a government, as members of this House, and dutiful, present ourselves? I have to say, we have a wonderful, strong, very ethical workforce out there. How can we face those people we have negotiated with for months, sometimes longer than that, and reached bona fide agreements, bona fide contracts, and on a whim we can say, "We're going to change them."

Someone once said, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander." Are we saying then—

Interjection.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Well, with all due respect, I have to say that when we negotiate with our people, with our employees, in good faith and then we say, "Now we're going to make some changes," they should have the same right. They should have the same right that one day they can turn around and say, "Well, you know what? We didn't like what we did," or "We want to change it, so we're going back on our word." I think this sends a very unfair message, not only for the intent that the member has brought the bill to the House, but for the content of the bill itself.

I certainly can't support it. I certainly can't support it, because we are doing nothing but demeaning our employees. These are people who work day in and day out for us and for our families. We just can't go back on our word and say, "Well, because now we have changed our minds, we are trying to change, rip up a contract that has been negotiated with unions, with representatives." We have had long consultations to reach this particular agreement, and now we say, "Well, you know what? We don't believe you are sick. Therefore, we're going to put it in writing that you will have to provide a certain medical record or whatever"—I mean, it is already in place—"if you are sick. But to go this particular route, I think, is very demeaning.

We can call them sick days, of course. Who would want to take a day off and call it a sick day without being sick?

Interjection: Lots.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I don't believe that. If there are some—it could be there are some—then they should be looking at the consequences as well. They should be looking at the consequences. But to put this particular bill in writing as it is, I think, is a disservice to our employees, and our employers as well. I think we have good, solid contracts in place, and we should respect that. It binds both. We have to respect the employees and we have to have, at the same time, respect for ourselves, otherwise where we would go from here?

1410

Speaker, I want to leave some time for my colleague the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, who wants to make remarks on this bill itself. I thank you, Speaker, and I thank the member for introducing the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise in this House this afternoon and speak to Bill 25, the Sick Days Act for Sick People Act.

I applaud the member from Durham for introducing this piece of legislation. My colleague has introduced many bills in his time here, and this is yet another excellent idea. I'll tell you why. At the core of this bill, it's all about fairness and balance. The abuse of sick days costs the province money. It limits the effectiveness of the public sector, and it hurts fellow public sector employees. Sick days must be there for those who need them and not for those who wish to abuse the system.

If—or should I say "when"?—this bill passes, it will allow workers in the Ontario public sector to bank unused sick days in the unfortunate event that they face illness in the future. I think that's fair. These sick days are a safety net to use in the event of illness so that employees are able to take time off work in order to get better and to help nurse a loved one back to health.

This bill is also fair in the way that it will be implemented. It is important to stress that this act would not impact the collectively bargained rights of the current public sector employees, as may have been implied by my colleague of the third party. All existing sick-leave gratuities would be honoured. That will prevent us from getting into some potentially messy issues while making a positive change, moving forward.

Another key element of this bill is its mechanism to help prevent the abuse of sick days by employees paid by the Ontario taxpayers. Abuse of sick leave reduces the effectiveness of the entire public sector, and that's something that impacts each and every citizen of this province. No one wants to do extra work to cover for someone who is not genuinely sick. If you take the day off and you weren't sick, if you cannot provide proper evidence—as my colleague from the government had mentioned earlier, there are certain guidelines in place that ask for specific medical documents to prove that you

were sick—such as a doctor's note, then you will give back any compensation you received for that sick day.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business released a study in 2012 on sick leaves in the Canadian public sector. Did you know that the overall public sector average is 12.9 days compared to only 8.2 days in the private sector? I doubt that employees in the public sector just happen to be less healthy than those in the private sector. Now, there may be some abuse going on, and this bill seeks to just simply tighten the rules to make sure that everyone gets a fair deal—a fair deal for Ontario taxpayers who pay the salaries of those abusing the system and a fair deal for the majority of public sector employees who do the right thing.

Like many in this House, I come from a background of private sector experience. Throughout all my experience in the private sector, we were never able to bank sick days for later fiscal compensation. Sick days were there for us if we needed them, if we became ill. We had to prove we were sick to make sure that those sick days were used by sick people.

We must do the right thing as elected representatives and look out for Ontarians. It is for these reasons that I will be supporting the member from Durham's bill, the Sick Days are for Sick People Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to speak to this bill because, as the member alluded to, a lot of us come from the private sector. In my experience in the private sector, we had 10 sick days per calendar year—business days. With that, I have to say I'm pretty much a very healthy person, and probably my whole career—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: God bless.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's right: God bless. And I hope to continue that health track record from here on forward until whenever I decide that my health isn't well; we'll have to go from there.

The thing is, where I worked in the private sector for about 22 years, I probably took—I don't know—maybe three sick days. I never thought once in my mind that I would ever abuse a sick day. But there was an interesting point, because as time went on and I got older and I wasn't sick, I kept thinking, "Gosh, I don't use my sick days, and you either use them or you lose them."

We talked in the boardroom one time; we had a meeting and employees felt that whether they took sick days or not, those unused sick days would be wasted, because nowadays there's a lot of people who have a lot of illnesses. As you mature, there's a lot of cancer, there's a lot of stress. What we just asked our employer collectively—we didn't have a collective agreement, but we asked our employer collectively, "Could you possibly look at us banking those sick days for using them in the future?" so that if someone did have an illness that was more than a month or two months off, then they could actually use that and not suffer economic challenges, because we had short-term sickness that couldn't extend past that one or two months. That was something I

thought was actually very fair, because when you are working somewhere for 20 years and you haven't used your sick days, should an unfortunate physical incident occur and you might need those sick days, that would have been a great comfort to many of the people that I worked with.

There were a lot of women, and a lot of women, of course, are—there were single women who were struggling to help with the raising of their children. It was a women-dominated environment.

That takes me to another point with regard to this bill. When we look at public sector workers and we look at the education piece, in the public school system, a lot of teachers are female, and there's sniffles and flus coming into the workplace.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: At the elementary level.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: At the elementary level; exactly. These women, these teachers, are exposed to a lot of illnesses. I've talked to teachers and they've felt that sometimes they couldn't take the time off because they didn't want to lose that valuable time with their students. So they suffered through those sick days; they spread the germs. They went home and spread it to their family. But what happened was—and we're talking about not banking sick days. So a lot of the times, they—I use the example of public school teachers—came to work.

In the end, if they are coming to work sick—which I did many times, sneezing all over my fellow co-workers. Some people were afraid to take a sick day. They were afraid to take a sick day because sometimes they felt that, as the member talked about, people would abuse a sick day. So you really had to feel like you couldn't even walk into work before you used a sick day, and that's not the intent of a sick day. If you aren't feeling well, you should be able to take a sick day.

If you don't need to use a sick day, that's where our collective agreements come in. That's when people can bargain whether or not they could look at using that as an agreement to negotiate: If they're not going to take a wage increase, if that's something that isn't available, maybe they could bank their sick days and use them at the end of their retirement. We talked about collective agreements, and this bill is an unconstitutional way of opening up this topic and it could actually cost the taxpayers more.

This bill, "Sick Days are for Sick People"—a little bit of an insult. I think everybody knows that there are sick days available for when you are sick. Having the impression or the thought that people are going to take time off when they are not sick isn't giving people the benefit of the doubt. I think most people in Ontario, most working people, are very honest and they're not going to abuse the system.

1420

I don't agree with this bill, Speaker. It's not a bill that I would support for sure. I think we need to give workers the benefit of the doubt that they're going to use sick days for what they're entitled to and not force them to

bring evidence of a sick day. That's already in most employers'—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a sick bill.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, it's a sick bill, as my one member has said. It needs a little revitalization; it needs to be a healthier bill. This is a sick bill, so I'm not going to vote for that bill.

Like I said, employers already have that three-day rule. That's the average rule. When you're sick for three days or more, you bring a doctor's note. People aren't going to take three days off to just put their feet up and have a vacation; they're really sick. And you know, Speaker, this year was the highest flu season in—I'll speak for London. Emergency rooms were packed. I was sick for the first time in a very long time, and I actually took some time off work—two days. I couldn't get out of bed. My son was sick. I passed it on to my daughter; I passed it on to my husband. Those are what sick days are meant to be.

Please don't assume that people who are sick are abusing sick days; they're not. No one is going to pretend to be sick if they're there for the use of what's intended. When you're sick and you need time off, you take your sick days. I'm sorry; I don't agree with the bill that people are abusing it. I think most people are very honest and they wouldn't be abusing a situation that's to their detriment. Who wants to be found out when they are perhaps doing something like that? I think people don't want to be called out on not being sick. I think people take these sick days very seriously when they have a job, and I don't think that there is the abuse and I don't think there's a need for this bill. So I'm going to say I disagree with this bill and leave a little bit of time for the member to give his summation about it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my pleasure to speak to the sick bill.

I think bringing up the bill is very worthwhile. To be frank, it's something that everybody's talking about, because it has been brought forward with the legislation we've had with the teachers, and it has come up. Therefore, I think it's legitimate for the member to bring the bill forward. It's a good analysis for us to undertake and it's valuable to do, and I don't deny him the right to do that. Like most of these private members' bills, they're good debates.

Questions have been raised. An element of the fact is that sometimes, too many of these types of bills are brought forward by the party opposite. One of the issues I have with this bill is that you'll never see them bring forward a bill that will talk about abuses by the private sector or by private employers. I brought forward a bill about people who run our oil companies who tolerate the fact that people who work at gas stations are paid minimum wage. Then, if someone steals gas from the gas station, they take money out of their wages to pay for the gas theft. That's tolerated in the private sector and it's

much too common. I don't see any bills about this type of abuse brought forward by the party opposite.

I also know that the member opposite is a great fan of Jack Mintz. Jack Mintz is on the front page of the *Globe* today, and today is budget day in Ottawa. Jack Mintz says that this government in Ottawa is a strange government. The Minister of Finance is even telling banks to raise mortgage rates. How does that help the little guy? Somehow, the Minister of Finance, who's not supposed to intervene in the marketplace, says, "I can intervene there," and Jack Mintz says that that's stupid. Your friend Jack Mintz says that. I just wanted to mention it.

Also on the same page in the *Globe*, I see another friend of the member from Durham: Konrad Yakabuski—not the MPP, but the brother. He makes an interesting point. I know the member is very interested in balancing the books in the province, and that's what the bottom line is here: You're trying to ensure that we have the appropriate revenues and there isn't any shortfall, and I applaud them for that. But do you know what Konrad Yakabuski says, especially on budget day? He says that the House is in order in Ottawa, but the provinces pay. If the member opposite and his fellow colleagues are really serious about doing something about Ontario's bottom line, he would look at the fact that the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates—here's what he says, that "cumulatively, provincial and local governments would need to cut spending or raise taxes by \$36 billion annually to achieve fiscal sustainability" if the federal government continues to claw out of the provinces and not give back to the provinces.

This even includes your friendly province of Alberta, who all of a sudden has a problem with the balance, right? It's not just Ontario, not Quebec—even Alberta. This is what Yakabuski is saying. He's saying, "Hey, listen: There's a \$36-billion bill coming," unless the gentleman—our former colleague here; remember when he sat in the House and he did so well with the budgets here? I wonder if, in Ottawa, he's going to do something about that \$36-billion download onto the cities and the province of Ontario.

And then there's another interesting comment from another *Globe* and *Mail* article, from Margaret Wente. Interestingly enough, she says that maybe your federal cousins should get their house in order, because they have some of the highest absentee rates of workers in Canada: Every day, about 19,000 federal employees are off on sick leave. The Treasury Board says that they take about 18 days off a year and that they bank sick days that leave a liability that amounts to \$5 billion in sick days; this is Flaherty's people.

Sure, we have issues here in Ontario, but unless we recognize that we have to fix some of our federal rules and regulations and the way they treat and download on the cities and download on the provinces, we're going to have a difficult time with our finances. By just saying, "Well, we can solve the problems by picking on the workers and the sick days," and the next day it will be something else—it's not going to do it.

The real macro issue is the fact that the people of Ontario work very hard. We don't have oil; we don't have potash. We work very hard in construction. We work very hard in health care. We work very hard in our minds. We work very hard fishing and farming. We work very hard in this province.

Today's the day of the federal budget. I thought the member from Durham would maybe have something that says that maybe the federal government should help the good people of Ontario by providing a few pennies for our roads, for our bridges and for our public transit. We are the only jurisdiction in the Western world where the federal government does not supply any financial support for mass transit. Denmark, Italy, France, Japan, Taiwan—in Ontario, no federal money, so maybe your friends in Ottawa should be helping us with our finances. That would be the next bill I hope you introduce. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 25 today, the Sick Days are for Sick People Act. I'd like to start first with a quote by the noted economist Art Laffer: "Honestly, it's not liberal, it's not conservative, it's not left-wing; it's economics. If you tax people who work and you pay people who don't work, don't be" bloody "surprised if you get a lot of people" who don't work. That's exactly what we've gotten here with our government's current policies toward sick days.

According to a recent study by the CFIB—the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—the average provincial employee takes nearly twice as many sick days as the average small business worker. Simply put, we're getting what we should expect: By paying people not to work, they're not working. In the Liberal government's ongoing competition with California to be the most indebted non-sovereign jurisdiction in the world, we are literally paying people to do nothing. It's ironic, given all of the McGuinty–Wynne government's talk.

1430

During question period today, the Minister of Finance said, "We're trying to ensure that we get proper value for" the taxpayer—proper value. Just how are we getting value for money by paying people who do not work? What benefit does the carpenter in Carleton Place, the miner in Sudbury, the banker in Toronto or the machinist in Windsor get from paying people not to work? I'm not sure what my honourable colleague the finance minister would say, but I think the answer is evident to anyone with a stitch of common sense: We are getting no benefit at all. The hard-working people of Ontario know that people should only get paid for the work they do, but that insight seems to be lost on our state workers and clearly lost on both parties of the coalition government that we have here today.

Some members of this House know that in addition to working as an electrician, both unionized and non-union in private firms, I also worked for the public sector for a period of time. In the private sector, if someone was genuinely sick, they would take the day off. Our labour

laws protect actual sick people, and this bill only reinforces that protection. But working for the government, working for the state, was very different for me. The culture was very different. Though there were certainly people who used their sick days because they were actually sick, many, many used them as paid vacation days. It was very disappointing and depressing for me to hear fellow employees talk about when they were going to get sick and what they were going to do on their sick days and the like. Indeed, I eventually became so sick of all the hogwash sick days that even politics seemed like a better alternative than working in the bureaucracy.

Speaker, you know that both the Minister of Finance and the member from Beaches–East York spoke of the need for a balanced approach to solving the Liberal government's financial mess. The member for Durham's bill does just that. It balances the need of genuinely sick people with the pocketbooks of the people who actually pay for this government largesse. It will save us hundreds of millions of dollars

I just want to emphasize for those people who have not read the bill yet, as we've heard from the NDP and the Liberals, that what this does is prevent people from cashing in their accumulated sick days at retirement and retiring early with those paid sick days. That's why I'm supporting this member. I do hope and trust that all the members of the NDP can take the time to read the bill, as well as the members of the Liberal Party, and actually find that stitch of common sense that is so required.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to speak real fast. I disagree with my friend from Durham and all the other Conservative friends that I have. When the Conservative member from Lanark says we haven't read the bill, we know exactly what the bill says. The bill ends the practice of cashing in on accumulated sick days, of being compensated for unused sick days in any way. We understand that.

You can't do it. You cannot legislate something that has been negotiated, because if you were to do that, you would be taken to court and you would lose—and you probably know that. But it's irrelevant, because you know that. What this is, is a concerted, determined, wilful attack on people who work in the civil service. That's what it is.

The problem, member from Lanark, is that you weren't here when your good buddy Mike Harris was here for 10 long, painful years, and I would have thought that you guys had your lesson and were ready to move on with a different agenda. But you guys have learned nothing. You come back with the same old agenda that your buddy brought years ago. Why not go after the real people, the real public with money, the ones who have the real bucks, the millionaires, the ones that we give corporate tax cuts to, both Liberals and Tories, who park their money in places where they do not invest in jobs? Why don't you go after them? Why don't you fine Tories go after them? And you—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —as well. That's where the money is, not going after civil servants who negotiated a deal. And at the end of it, these people say, "The deal don't matter; we're going to end it." Please. You can't do that; you know it. You can't do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm not really sure if Hansard is going to catch all that because certainly the member wasn't speaking in his microphone, but I hope the theatrics actually make the nightly news, because it might show the circus of what that was.

But, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to speak to your bill, too.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm happy you're going to speak to my bill, member for Trinity–Spadina, because we have to really talk about that bill and how you're going to support it. I actually wore—if you can tell, member from Trinity–Spadina—my solidarity tie today, my orange and blue tie, just for you.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have to say I commend the bill brought forth by the member from Durham, and I have to say in my time that I have a few things. First and foremost, I know the minister responsible for seniors spoke about defrauding Ontarians, and I think the only party that's responsible for defrauding Ontarians are the Liberals with the scandals that they brought forth—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Rob Leone: I withdraw.

Then the member for Timmins–James Bay had talked eloquently about private sector bargaining, but we do see something different in the public sector, Mr. Speaker. I have to say this as someone who was part of the public sector prior to entering politics: I know how bargaining actually operates a little differently in the public sector, in the sense that every bargaining unit actually looks around and shops around for who's got the best deal, and that best deal then becomes negotiated for everybody. As that happens, salaries, compensation, benefits start to rise.

This isn't about kicking the little guy and helping the rich, as the member for Timmins–James Bay and maybe the member for Trinity–Spadina were alluding to—I'm not really sure. This is about the fact that there is limited public money in the public sector, and when compensation rises at a point far beyond our ability to pay, there are two options, and we're confronted with those options today, Mr. Speaker. The two options are simply: You're going to lay off people or you have to reduce the compensation of benefits in order for things to go forward.

Rather than kicking the little guy and laying off public servants, what we're suggesting is everyone take a standstill. Make sure that compensation doesn't rise excessively—to be prudent fiscal managers, to be responsible of the public purse. I think our number one

obligation as elected officials is to do that. So rather than kicking the little guy, what we're doing is supporting all public servants in this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Durham, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. John O'Toole: It has been an interesting yet not very informative debate on the other side. I'm quite surprised. It's evident from my listening and paying attention that they really haven't read the bill, and that's really what's disheartening here, because in all the great theatrical gestures that have been made, certainly by my good friend from Trinity–Spadina—very theatrical, a thespian. I'd say he's a thespian for sure. There's no question about that.

I would only say that I did listen to the original speaker from Timmins–James Bay. He was very passionate—I think a former union president in the mining industry.

I would say that the most informative was the NDP member from London–Fanshawe. I think she actually, having some private sector experience, recognized the reality here. What it is, is first of all, the bill should be titled, I think, Respect for Taxpayers. Wrap around that the context of where Ontario is. Ontario is in a significant problem: potentially a \$30-billion operating deficit. That's about 15 to 20 cents on every dollar we're spending that's borrowed. The third-highest expenditure is debt interest—almost \$11 billion a year—and right now interest is very low. I'm telling you, with all this money that's being pumped—inflationary money for infrastructure money, phony money like the \$3 trillion in the States—that's future interest, because it creates inflation without growth in the economy by printing money. When there's way too much inflation, you have to have higher interest. Interest always has to be higher than the rate of inflation.

1440

That's simple Economics 101. And with low interest and high debt, going to almost \$300 billion in Ontario, it's frightening, and I think those are the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. We'll vote on this item at the end of regular business.

LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA NÉCESSITÉ DE VIVRE SELON NOS MOYENS

Mr. Leone moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to enact the Balanced Budget Act, 2013 and to amend the Financial Administration Act /
Projet de loi 26, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur l'équilibre budgétaire et modifiant la Loi sur l'administration financière.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise in this House to speak to Bill 26. The short name of Bill 26 is the Living Within Our Means Act.

I want to first highlight the specific name of this act, the Living Within Our Means Act. We in the province of Ontario, I think—and all members of the Legislature, go home to their families and they actually look over their budgets. I'm pretty sure they look at their bank account statements, and if they have the benefit of having stock portfolios, they are looking at that every day. They're making sure that the money that they have at their disposal to spend on their daily activities is enough to sustain themselves from month to month or week to week or day to day, depending on how they're managing this.

All Ontarians are asking the people of this Legislature to do is to simply follow what we do when we go home each night: to live within our means. I think it's the responsibility of the government to stand up and say with definitive terms, in no uncertain terms, that we are going to live within our means. That's why the bill is named as it is.

The bill contains, obviously, two major important acts and legislation that it's discussing. One is a Balanced Budget Act, and members of this Legislature will know in particular that we had at one time a Balanced Budget Act in the province of Ontario that was repealed in 2004. This act seeks to enact a Balanced Budget Act for 2013 that builds upon the promise of that bill.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight for members of this Legislature what we know to be true.

Every party and every caucus in this Legislature has stood and said that they are committed to balancing the budget, and we have our timelines. Those timelines are set. We want to make sure that we balance this budget within a reasonable time frame, and this bill accounts for that. We're not saying that this budget has to be balanced tomorrow, although I think a lot of Ontarians would like to see, at some time, some recognition that we are concerned about the fiscal health of our province, because the fiscal health of our province, frankly, is in terrible shape. But we are saying that by April 1, 2017, we should balance the budget. We're giving the government the runway to balance the budget in a reasonable time frame. We wanted to approach this bill in a very reasonable way, because this is something that you've committed to. This is something that all parties have committed to. If this is something concretely believed by all parties, then they should offer a little bit of accountability and reassurance to the people of the province of Ontario that we are, in fact, going to balance our budget, and that if we don't balance our budget by the timelines we've stated, we're prepared to take the bullet, we're prepared to take a pay cut. That is, I think, the kind of accountability that we seek in the province of Ontario.

I know in the last session I had the privilege of introducing the first piece of private members' business in this Legislature, in the first session of the 40th Parliament. Mr. Speaker, that motion that I brought forth was about accountability. It was about ensuring that the promises made by the government, particularly with

respect to hospital infrastructure announcements, were promises they were prepared to keep. So I asked the government, in that motion, to table plans brought forth to ensure there is accountability. How are we going to pay for these infrastructure projects? What are the timelines? What are the development stages of these projects? This bill is a continuation of that theme. We need to show Ontarians that we're prepared to stand by our commitments.

People are cynical about politics, and part of that cynicism is driven by the fact we aren't prepared to stand by our commitments. I think it's a responsibility of members of this Legislature to do that, to stand behind the commitments we make and be prepared to take the financial hit if we can't keep the promises that we make.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, one potential issue we may encounter from time to time is that our projections are sometimes thrown off the rails. That can happen when there's a natural disaster where money obviously has to be spent, perhaps in a time of drought to help the farmers who have a crop devastation. It might be because of a medical outbreak of a proportion that hampers people's movement and the economy's movement of people and goods. We want to account for that as well. This bill actually suggests that in times of natural disaster, the Minister of Finance can present that case to the people of this Legislature to ask for some grace because of some unintended natural disaster that might have thrown the fiscal projections off-kilter.

The same thing is true of an unforeseen economic downturn. This bill also accounts for those circumstances as well. I know we faced those circumstances in the province of Ontario recently. When your revenues fall below 5%, and that 5% reduction is not as a result of a planned decrease in revenues, this doesn't apply in those circumstances as well.

I want to assure the people of this Legislature and the people of Ontario that great pains were taken in the crafting of this bill to ensure it was reasonable, to ensure we were going to come here in this assembly, 107 men and women, to think concretely about the promises we've made and to ensure direct accountability for what we've talked about. I think that's all Ontarians really want from us in this Legislature. They want us to come here, talk, debate and make sure that when we leave, we've come actually with the purpose of keeping the promises that we've made.

So I'm very proud to present this bill and what the balanced budget part of this legislation can do for the people of the province in reassuring them that the promises we make are the promises we're prepared to keep. I know that our party has stated in our white paper, *Paths to Prosperity: A New Deal for the Public Sector*, which is available to all people in the province of Ontario, that we are committed and we want to seek a commitment to balance the books by April 1, 2017. That is our timeline. That's our commitment.

We know we have a number of things we have to do in order to get there. Part of that is to support my friend from Durham's bill, the Sick Days are for Sick People

Act, because we have to understand the pressures of compensation in the public sector and what that does to the public purse, keeping in mind, of course, that we want to make sure to the greatest extent possible that we're avoiding catastrophic layoffs, because we don't have the money. The money has in fact run out.

The second part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, talks about limiting the amount of debt that we have in the province of Ontario. I want to be very clear about this. Maybe I'll reference this by way of a very personal public service announcement. I want to say to all members of the Legislature that within the next month, my wife and I are going to have our third child.

Applause.

Mr. Rob Leone: I hope that's not the only applause I'm going to get from members of this Legislature with respect to this bill. We have to keep in mind that we can't let the poor financial decisions we are making, and that this government in particular is making, be put on the backs of our children. The per capita debt in the province of Ontario is close to \$20,000, so when my third child is born within the next month, Mr. Speaker, he is going to share that burden. Within his first breath, he is going to have \$20,000 slapped on his back. And I think that's a troubling thing.

1450

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Look what you did to that poor kid.

Mr. Rob Leone: What we did to the poor kid? I'm sure we'll have some discussion about that. But I think that that government over there doubled the size of the debt in the province of Ontario, and maybe when the NDP were in power, they had significant a deficit at the end of their term as well. I'm not really sure about that.

The facts speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker. I do want to state that if we look comparatively at all provinces in this country and we look at the debt-to-GDP ratio, the debt-to-GDP ratio in the province of Ontario is about 40%. In Saskatchewan, for example, it's about 5%; in Alberta, still before their budget is tabled, it's at 0%. Ontario is second-last, second-last to only the province of Quebec, which has a 50% debt-to-GDP ratio. This is about not putting the poor financial decisions on the backs of our future generation, of my kids, your kids, our kids. We should respect that going forward.

If we look comparatively—we talked about Denmark and a lot of countries earlier—10 years ago, there were several countries that had debt-to-GDP ratios in the world similar to where Ontario is at right now, about 40%. Where are they 10 years later, Mr. Speaker?

Spain: Without changing course, Spain is at a 56% debt-to-GDP ratio, and we know the kind of economic turmoil we see in Spain. The United States of America has a debt-to-GDP ratio of 73%, and we know that that is going up as we speak. Again, the United Kingdom, 10 years ago, had a debt-to-GDP ratio of about 40%. The United Kingdom right now is at about 73% as well. France, 10 years ago, again a similar situation to the province of Ontario: France's debt-to-GDP ratio—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sarkozy, that spendthrift. Ils dépendent trop, monsieur le Président.

Mr. Rob Leone: He says it well, but what he hasn't said is that that debt-to-GDP ratio is 81%.

Of course, I know that there are problems that we see in the area around Greece. Certainly, Cyprus has issued some problems with respect to stealing people's money, and I hope we never get to that stage. Greece, again with a debt-to-GDP ratio that within the last decade or two was similar to where Ontario is at today, at 40%; today, their debt-to-GDP ratio is at a staggering 153%

If we're really serious about getting our fiscal house in order, we have to be prepared to make the tough decisions today in order for us to not become a Spain, a United States of America, a United Kingdom, a France or, God help us, Mr. Speaker, a Greece. Let's make those tough decisions today. Let's work to give the people of Ontario some assurance that we're prepared to balance the budget and not put our future generation at risk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It is an honour to be able to have the opportunity to speak to this bill, which is creatively short-titled Living Within Our Means. I believe very strongly that governments need to live within our means, that taxpayers deserve value for their hard-earned money. But this bill falls very short. It is nothing more than rhetoric. It promises results but it has neither the tools nor the capacity to deliver them. This bill is nothing more than a gimmick.

The biggest shortcoming of this bill may be the fact that balancing the budget is in many ways in the eyes of the beholder. How many times have we had federal or provincial governments balance the books only to later have a new government step in and say that the previous government operated a deficit. If the member is truly concerned with delivering balanced budgets and accountability, then this bill would be about putting in place accounting principles and setting a standard of practice that ensures that no matter who crunches the numbers, the bottom line is the same. This bill doesn't do that. Not only that, but there have been previous bills in this very Legislature that were intended—and I will use that term very lightly—to protect taxpayers, such as the Taxpayer Protection Act, which was introduced by the PC government in the 1990s. Did that act, that was introduced by the very same PCs, force them to abide by the legislation? No. In fact, the present leader of the official opposition voted not once but twice to override the act when he was a cabinet minister so that none of the penalties would apply to him. So, not only is this bill frivolous, but the party advocating for it lacks credibility on the issue.

I've mentioned it before in this House, and it deserves repeating: When it comes to the federal and provincial fiscal track records, which are tracked by the federal Conservative government through the publicly available Fiscal Reference Tables, it's the NDP that comes out on top. Since 1980, 46.3%—

Interjections.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: You know, the Conservatives should listen to these numbers—46.3% of NDP budgets have been in surplus.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Can I have a point of order? Could I please ask, through you, that the members could respectfully listen to the member's comments, because I'm having trouble hearing it?

Interjection.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Anyway, as I've said before: Since 1980, 46.3% of NDP budgets have been in surplus. This is compared to a much lower 40.4% rate of Conservative surplus budgets and an abysmal 25.7% for the Liberals. Why is that? That's because New Democrats have a deep respect for the hard-working families who are paying these tax bills. We are concerned with actual impacts of our decisions—what they will have—and we will not use gimmicks such as the downloading of costs to another level of government in an attempt to make ourselves look good. Most notably, this happened during the Mike Harris years, when he downloaded the costs for billions of dollars of responsibilities onto municipal ledgers in order to make his own budget appear to balance. The end result was that Harris balanced his books on paper—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex come to order.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: —but taxpayers didn't save a dime, and municipalities had less money to update infrastructure and offer their core existing services.

Do you know what? I see the mayor of Kenora; I see Dave Canfield, who is in the gallery. His community is acutely aware of the serious financial hardships that were created by the PC government of the 1990s, because then they downloaded over \$100 million of roads, bridges and culverts for his community alone. The end result was a huge collateral deficit for the hard-working people of this province.

Similarly, there has been a great deal of attention paid to privatizing profitable organizations like the LCBO and the Ontario lotteries in order to come up with some cash in the short term. In the long term, the government will be short billions of dollars in annual revenue and will have to raise taxes or cut services. But, according to those who are advocating for these changes, that's someone else's problem—perhaps that of our children.

We need to stop governing in the short term and we need to avoid political legislation such as Bill 115 and legislated wage freezes which look good on paper—they may sound good—but have been shown, time and time again, that they actually cost taxpayers more in the long term.

Balancing the budget is about choices. It's about showing leadership that isn't just concerned with appearing to deliver results today but is concerned with cutting costs and planning for tomorrow: strategies like investing in health promotion and home care, which is

known to drastically reduce the costs of delivering health care; creating fair social assistance rates that allow recipients to get out of the cycle of dependency; and creating a long-term infrastructure plan. Those are meaningful ways, meaningful steps, that we can take to bring down costs and to ensure the fiscal viability of this province.

This bill talks tough but it lacks any teeth to deliver the results. And it's not even headed in the right direction. It is high on rhetoric but it's entirely lacking in substance. For that reason, I absolutely cannot support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm going to share my time with the government House leader, but I did want to comment on this because I read the bill through. I know that the member from Cambridge is a former university professor, a very distinguished PhD, so I was quite looking forward to reading his bill. I read it over, and I am disappointed, because I found it incomprehensible, unfathomable, unworkable and, most of all, unreadable. I couldn't understand it.

1500

I noted your comments, member opposite, where he said—in his remarks, he said, “I took great pains in drafting this bill.” Well, I was looking for something just as simple as readability. I think it's important just to give you a flavour for this. This is just the explanatory note; this is not the details of the bill, the details in the sections of the act, but this is just by way of general opening explanation, to help the layperson and the members understand it.

“Beginning with the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the executive council must plan for a balanced budget and the Minister of Finance must present a balanced budget to the assembly. Special provision is made with respect to expenditures arising from such extraordinary circumstances as a natural disaster or the declaration of war.” There's the possibility under this act that if Ontario declares war, then there are a whole lot of things that kick in. But anyway, that's an extreme statement. “Special provision is also made for a decline in revenues of 5 per cent or more that does not result from a decrease in taxes.

“If a deficit is planned, the executive council is required to develop a recovery plan for achieving a balanced budget in the future. Details of the recovery plan must be included in the multi-year fiscal plan in the budget papers.

“If there is a deficit, the salary payable to members of the executive council under the Executive Council Act is reduced. Different rules are established when an initial deficit is more than 1 per cent of revenues and when an initial deficit is lower. When there is a lower deficit, provision is made for it to be offset by an equivalent surplus of revenues in the following year to avoid the initial salary reduction.

“For an initial deficit, the salary reduction for the members of the executive council is 25 per cent of the salary payable under the Executive Council Act, and lasts

for one year. If there is a deficit in the following year, the reduction is increased to 50 per cent, and lasts a year for each consecutive year in which there is a deficit.

“Section 4 of the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, which currently requires the executive council to plan for a balanced budget and specifies when a deficit is permitted, is repealed,” and so on.

That’s just the opener. Then if you want the details, let me give you the flavour of this. This is the definition of “deficit” under subsection (2) of the act:

“For the purposes of this act, the province has a deficit in a fiscal year if ‘A’ is greater than ‘B.’” Then it goes on to tell us when A is greater than B. It says,

“[W]here,

“‘A’ is the amount of the expenditures for the year less the sum of,

“(a) any expenditure described in paragraph 1 or 2 of subsection 2(2) in the year, and

“(b) the amount, if any, by which the revenues in the year have declined since the previous fiscal year for a reason other than a reduction in a tax rate under a designated tax statute or the PVAT rate under the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement, if the decline is at least 5 per cent of the previous year’s revenues.” That’s A. Now here’s B:

“‘B’ is the sum of the revenues and the accumulated net surplus, if any, for the year.”

Then it goes on:

“(3) The amount of the accumulated net surplus for a fiscal year is the amount by which the sum of the revenues for the previous three fiscal years exceeds the sum of the expenditures for the previous three fiscal years.

“(4) Despite subsection (3), the amount of the accumulated net surplus for the fiscal year beginning on April 1, 2017 is the amount by which the revenues for the” —

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You cannot interrupt debate for a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Yes, you can. There’s no rule like that.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the member speak to the bill, not read the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member is staying within the confinements.

Hon. David Zimmer: I’m reading from the bill; this is the bill.

Anyway, it goes on to say, “... is the amount by which the revenues for the previous fiscal year exceed the expenditures for the previous fiscal year.” Then it goes on.

“(5) Despite subsection (3), the amount of the accumulated net surplus for the fiscal year beginning on April 1, 2018 is the amount by which the sum of the revenues for the previous two fiscal years exceeds the sum of the expenditures for the previous two fiscal years.”

I called an accountant friend of mine and read this to him and I said, “I’m a lawyer. I’m used to reading complicated documents, but I’m not an accountant and I’m having trouble getting my head around this. Can you help me out? Because I have to speak to it Thursday afternoon.” He read it over, and you know what he said? He said, “Well, I’m reminded of the old saying. I think the way that bill’s drafted, it fits into this description.” He said, “It’s best summed up—you should ask the member opposite: How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” That was his response to it.

This is a silly piece of political posturing. If it passes—I think it takes effect in 2017-18. So I suppose if it does pass—well, I’m certainly not going to vote for it—we’ve at least got from 2013 to 2017, 2018. We’ve got four or five years to try to figure out what it all means and, frankly, I think there’s more meaning in the expression, “How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?”

This is a silly piece of political Thursday afternoon private members’ posturing. I would have expected more of a distinguished doctor of philosophy from a distinguished university—McMaster University.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: It’s my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 26, the Living Within Our Means Act, introduced by my good friend and colleague the member for Cambridge.

I would first like to start out by applauding the member because he, unlike the current government, has presented a serious plan to balance the budget in a timely fashion. He and I both know, as fathers, that we must take immediate steps to rein in runaway public sector spending to preserve the same standard of living for our children.

Just think that my son Murphy, who’s just 14 months old, has already been saddled with a burden of more than \$20,000 of provincial debt. This isn’t the way Ontario should be. We simply can’t afford to spend like drunken sailors today, only to sober up a few years from now to realize that the party is over.

Anyone who has ever been faced with a crisis or emergency will tell you that being cautious and being incremental will not save you. The only way forward is to move quickly, confidently and boldly in the direction that you know is right.

Now, I was glad to see that, in fact, one Liberal recognized the severity of Ontario’s fiscal situation. In fact, he described the province’s debt as a ticking time bomb—

Interjection: Who was that?

Mr. Michael Harris: That was the former finance minister, and unfortunately—well, fortunately—he is no longer part of the government; however, he was part of the problem.

I have to say that I am truly troubled by the Liberal government’s backtracking on its commitment in the

throne speech to balance the budget by 2017-18. Over the last couple of weeks, we've seen the new finance minister waffle on the government's commitment to balance the books on a multiple number of occasions and, in fact, he's refused to rule out tax increases on those middle-class families. This is unacceptable. Ontario taxpayers should not be left to pick up the tab for the Liberals' financial mess.

Part of governing is being accountable to the people and being responsible with the hard-earned money they pay in taxes. That is exactly what this bill will do. Since we've seen that the Liberal government continues to refuse to balance the books on its own, we need to put legislative rules in place to hold cabinet accountable.

Now I know that I'm almost out of time, but I want to point out that each minute I've been speaking, the Liberal government has added \$23,000 to the provincial debt. That means during the time that I gave this speech, roughly—it was three minutes long—\$69,000 down the hole, down the drain.

As I mentioned before, a young son of mine, 14 months old—and Mr. Leone, the member for Cambridge, just announced recently that he and his wife and his family will be expecting their third child; to know that when he takes his first breath, \$20,000 he'll have straddled to his back.

It is so important that we take the steps to stop the loss of revenue today, and that is why I'll be voting in favour of this bill, in support of the Living Within Our Means Act. I thank the member for bringing it forward, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill today.

1510

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to Bill 26, the Living Within Our Means Act. I know what this is about, and so does the member from Cambridge, and all the other Tory members. This isn't about the debate here. Nobody watches this debate except a couple of people in the stands here and a couple of good people who watch this channel because they like a few of us and they want to hear what we've got to say. But the majority of people don't have a clue what we say.

This is about a few nice Tory bills that you take out to the public in Cambridge or Durham or some other rural community, and then you take this bill and you say, "We tried to pass this modest bill, the Living Within Our Means Act, and you know what? New Democrats opposed it. Can you believe it? And you know what? Liberals opposed a very simple bill that says it makes it illegal for a government to run a deficit, except in extraordinary circumstances. Don't you agree?" And people say, "Yeah, of course we agree," because it makes sense.

It's a simple bill. I get it. I understand the politics of this. All I want to say to the member of Cambridge—because I like a lot of Tory members, I have to admit. I don't like the politics, but I like a lot of you guys. I have to say that this is a throwback to a Harris agenda that I don't believe is creative. You young'uns are the ones

who should be bringing some creativity, because you can't rely on the old ones who are here. You can't do that, with all due respect, because I'm there. A lot of the old ones bring that Harris baggage. You've got to get it off. Just shed it, throw it off, but don't go back to the same stuff that people heard 15 or 20 years ago. You've got to be fresh, and none of you are fresh with your ideas. You're going back to your old base, and you've got to understand, member from Cambridge, your base is not enough to form government. That's why I'm urging you—I'm doing it for your own good; I'm trying to help. I am saying to you, bring something out that's creative. And I don't know what that could be from a Conservative point of view. I don't know. Because the old Progressive Conservatives knew exactly what they had to do, the old ones. Remember Davis and all the gang of the past? You guys were good at understanding—the old guys were good at understanding—you make change progressively and ever so slowly, but make change.

But you young'uns now picked up the bad habits of the Reform Party and the Harris regime, and it's not helping you. Remember, Reagan left a huge deficit. These are your buddies—Republicans, but your buddies. Bush, both young and old, left huge deficits—huge. They devastated America, and the world, for that matter. And then you've got Thatcher, another good old buddy of yours from the other part of the world, and not so far away you had Mulroney. God bless. He left a \$50-billion deficit, too. And not so far away was the Harris regime, the very ones who brought forth the Taxpayer Protection Act, you'll recall. How could you have a great economy for eight long, painful years—because it was a good economy—and leave a deficit of \$5 billion? How do Tories do that? I don't get it. I just don't get it.

This bill—I understand the politics of it. It's good for your base. God bless. But it's just not going to go anywhere.

I'd love to say more about tax loopholes and going after corporations, but I'm going to leave that to my other friend who needs to have three minutes on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a great honour for me to speak on this bill this afternoon. I must say, I'm a little bit challenged following my friend the member from Trinity-Spadina, because a number of the comments that he made were ones that I was planning to say. But as the old saying goes, everything that needs to be said may have been said, but it hasn't been said by me. So let me just repeat a couple of the things he said about this bill.

When I looked at it, the first thing that struck me was that it's gimmicks, it's about the type of Tea Party politics that we see in the United States, our neighbours to the south, and it's not about really what's at the core. You know what, Mr. Speaker? I want to put just a few things on the table here, on the record for all of us to consider.

The first is—and you can quote me, folks—every party of this House is concerned about the deficit and the

debt that's facing this province. I actually believe that—every single party. I also believe—and actually, it's not a belief; it's a fact—that every party of this Legislature, when they have been in government, has run deficits. In fact, in 2003, when we came in, despite the assertions made by Premier Eves at the time, we found ourselves with a \$5.6-billion deficit that had been saddled on us by the Conservatives.

The other issue is that there are situations where deficits are necessary. You just have to go to Ottawa, you have to go to any province across this country, including our province, to talk about the 2008 recession and the deficits that all governments ran in order to stimulate the economy and get us through a pretty, pretty dire circumstance here in the province of Ontario and here in the country of Canada.

We are back on track. We have seen the deficit come down over the next number of years. We have a plan in place, and what's very encouraging about that plan is that, unlike the federal government and unlike other provinces, we haven't had to recast it. We haven't had to talk about how we've had to delay things. We're on track, not only meeting our targets but most recently, as members are aware, in fact exceeding those targets with the deficit that came forward.

So where does all this leave us? This leaves us with not calm water ahead. There are some tough choices that are going to have to be made by this government. Tough choices are going to have to be made by whoever is on the government side of the House, no matter what party. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? As we prepare a budget right now, what we need is discussion. We need conversation. We need people willing to roll up their sleeves and talk about these difficult choices, talk about the types of dialogue and discussion that we have to have with the people of Ontario. And you know what? I'm going to hand it to my friends in the New Democratic Party. They've come forward with some suggestions, with some ideas for consideration, and that dialogue is going on.

But what I find most troubling is the attitude of the Conservatives. What we have seen is a leader, in the person of Mr. Hudak, who came forward several weeks ago and announced to the world that not only had he not seen the budget—the budget hadn't been drafted—that, instead of rolling up his sleeves and having that kind of dialogue, he announced that he would be voting against the budget, sight unseen.

A lot of what goes on here at Queen's Park really is, as the old expression goes, inside baseball. But that fact is something that is raised by constituents over and over again as I'm out in my community. They come to me and say, "How's it going down there? Are you guys able to work together?" And they say, "What's with the Conservatives? They're talking about voting against the budget, and they haven't even seen it. Why aren't they coming forward with their ideas? Why aren't they coming forward to the table to roll up their sleeves and sit down and try to work it through?"

Instead—and I say this with great respect to the member from Cambridge; he's a neighbour of mine just to the south of me—but instead of coming forward with the ideas, instead of coming forward and saying, "Let's have a dialogue; let's see if it can work. We're going to hold the government's feet to the fire. Our vote will depend on the type of budget that we see," he says, "We're going to vote against the budget. We don't care what's in it. We don't want to be part of that process." And at the same time, "The best we can offer are some Tea Party gimmicks from the United States," the kind of stuff, as my friend from Trinity-Spadina pointed out, that was all popular back when Mr. Harris was here. And we know—we've heard some of the statistics—that on the one hand he was talking about all this fiscal responsibility and at the same time running huge deficits, and as we came into power in 2003, seeing those deficits come to life through a surprise \$5.6 billion that we encountered.

These are serious times. There are going to have to be tough decisions that are made by all parties as we move forward. We're going to need a partnership with the people of Ontario. We need dialogue. When I talk to constituents, they're telling me, "Roll up your sleeves and get to work down at Queen's Park to make sure that we can get the fiscal house in order and to make sure that the economy continues to move." We don't need gimmicks. We don't need silly bills like this. We need co-operation, and we need an opposition party that's willing to come to the table and not say, "Sight unseen, we're going to vote against your government."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: One thing I would agree on with the government House leader is, these are serious times, and we are looking at it very, very seriously.

If you talk about being reasonable, being responsible, being accountable, I'll remind you that the debt when your government came into power in 2003 was \$125 billion, and today, just 10 years later, that debt is close to \$275 billion. Now if that's accountability and that's responsibility, then I'm befuddled as to what you are really trying to accomplish through your government when you talk about responsibility.

1520

First of all, I'm pleased to rise in this House today to speak to Bill 26, Living Within Our Means, something this government has not been doing for the last 10 years. And again, I want to respectfully thank my colleague from Cambridge for introducing this very timely bill. Speaker, this bill aims to eliminate the deficit by 2016. If the government misses its goal, we're saying cabinet's salary should then be reduced by 25%.

Let's talk about consistency. That's one thing this government right now has been: extremely consistent in missing its goals over the last 10 years. Revenue is down, and spending is up and continues to climb. Households know what it means to balance books. So I ask, how can this Liberal government, with a straight face, ask its citizens to tighten their belts and live on less money

while they completely ignore their own advice? Government should lead by example when it comes to fiscal responsibility. But this Liberal government is more about “do as I say, not as I do.”

If a person loses income, they don't keep on spending. They sit down, they look at their budget and they make hard choices. You do it with the future in mind. You don't put it all on a credit card and make minimum payments. If you do, your credit card score is going to plummet, just like Ontario has faced three credit downgrades since 2009, under this Liberal government.

Not only are we about to run out of money; we're also about to run out of time. That's why this bill is so important. We've got to tackle the deficit sooner rather than later. The government may say, “What difference does a year make?” Well, in a single year, we spend roughly \$10 billion in interest on our debt; \$10 billion is essentially thrown down the drain.

What could that much money mean to a riding like Chatham–Kent–Essex or any of the other 106 ridings in this province? We face massive shortages of doctors in my riding. We could use some of that money to attract more doctors. We have a serious lack of funding for hip and knee replacements. There are people in my riding who are in constant pain waiting for these surgeries. That would be a much better use of funds than tossing money down the drain on ongoing debt payments.

These are just some of the reasons that I stand strong in support of my colleague from Cambridge and Bill 26. And that's why, again, I believe we need to unite and support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, we're not going to unite and support this bill. I don't want to disappoint you, but I will.

Listen, we've seen this whole thing before. I remember Tim Hudak and a number of members who are currently in the Legislature today, who sat there in the time of Harris. He came in with great fanfare and introduced exactly the same bill. He said, “Why are we doing that? Because we want to be fair to the taxpayer.” In fact, I think they called it the Taxpayer Protection Act. And then they said, “Never will there be a deficit, and if there is, we're going to cut back the salaries of cabinet ministers.”

Well, the minute they got in any trouble, what did this government do? It ran to the Legislature, introduced legislation and overrode the provisions of their own bill. My God, Mr. Speaker, they were saying one thing to the voters, but when it came to affecting their pay, because they had done things that didn't deal with balancing the budget, they ran into this Legislature. They overrode their own legislation on at least two occasions that I can remember. So I find this a little bit much.

I find it a little bit much that they stand here and say, “This is the only way we're going to ensure that people balance budgets.” That's not how you balance a budget. I thought the speech given by the member from Kenora–

Rainy River hit it on the head: Balancing a budget is a serious piece of work. It's something that we have to take seriously. It's something that all the parties in this House have committed to; we want to balance the budget by 2017-18.

I think the difference of the political parties is how you get there. We, as New Democrats, are saying there has to be a balanced approach, and it's about doing a couple of things. It's about saying, one, let's make sure that what we've got, we manage well. We're spending money in the province on health care, education, roads and many other essential services, and we need to make sure that the dollars we spend are spent in a way that respects the ability to pay.

The other thing we've got to do is that we have to take a look at how we grow this economy. It's not a question of raising taxes every time you have a problem. You've got to grow the economy. For example, I talked earlier today about how there's a great opportunity to develop a stainless steel industry here in Ontario from the potential of the Ring of Fire that will not only give jobs in northwestern and northeastern Ontario when it comes to mining, but it will also create great opportunities when it comes to the development of manufacturing jobs and everything in between when it comes to the development of stainless steel.

Then we've got to take a look at our tax regime. You know that our party and Andrea Horwath have spoken here many times about a number of tax loopholes that need to be cut in order to make sure that people are paying their fair share, make sure that we do what is best for the taxpayer at the end of the day and make sure that we balance budgets in a balanced and responsible way.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to get up and talk to this bill from my colleague from Cambridge. He raises a lot of good points about having to pay your way. This country is built on debt financing that looked at key investments, but this is not debt financing; this is operational costs that are borrowed year after year after year.

I can't help but go back when I hear the House leader talk about the 2003-04 budget under Harris. I was a newly elected mayor; I'd been a councillor for a number of years before that out in South Glengarry. When we got there and this government spent \$3 billion of that deficit in the last week of March—\$1.5 billion to the city of Toronto and \$1.5 billion to the rest of the province, in two weeks. I remember the honourable MPP from our region, Jim Brownell, saying he was so busy delivering the cheques that he couldn't do it all in the last week of March. The money would flow, though; it would belong to that year's budget. Then, through some accounting changes, they manufactured that debt.

This is a government, right from the start, whose idea was to deceive the people out there. Stand up and do what's right. That's just what I saw. When we look at some of the results they have here—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order?

Hon. Jeff Leal: The member used the term “deceive.” I’m not sure that that’s parliamentary, so I’ll ask your ruling on that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Withdrawn.

So, when looking at some of the great points that you raised here—you talked about the debt-to-GDP, which this government has doubled. There was a Maclean’s magazine article just a couple of weeks ago that really painted a much worse story than that. They talked about us comparing Ontario to Greece, France—the countries in Europe that we’re talking about. They’re talking about a national debt. When you add in Canada’s debt, the WSIB debt of \$19.5 billion—we’re talking about unfunded liabilities—it put our debt up with Greece, painting a much more different story than when you consider Ontario by itself, because, really, we have to look at the country when you add in those debts.

The good news for us, I guess—the reason we haven’t had further downgrades—was that outside lending authorities are counting on the federal government to bail us out. They also put us as the first province that is likely to default on our debt. These are not great things; we should be trying to attract business. We have to get out of the way of business and let them function, let them hire people and give good-paying jobs; this government has done everything but.

I’ll give the remaining time to my colleague to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Rod Jackson: It’s a real honour to rise here and speak to my colleague from Cambridge’s Bill 26, An Act to enact the Balanced Budget Act. I really do find it pretty astounding, the level of resistance to it. That really speaks to the crux of the problem that we have here in Ontario, with a massive debt and deficit that’s better than double of all the provinces put together.

There has been no bill that the government has put forward since this new session that has even begun to try to address this. The fact that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs actually stood up not a couple of minutes ago and read the majority of the bill out here in the House only to make the point that he didn’t understand it—does it drive home the point that we’re trying to tell you? You don’t get it. You don’t understand what’s wrong.

We have a debt and a deficit that need to be taken care of, need bold action and need somebody—thank God we have the member from Cambridge, who has the capacity to actually write a bill that will actually make a change and help reduce the deficit and debt in the province of Ontario, so that our children don’t have to pay for it, so that my two young children don’t have to pay it, so his two young children and future children don’t have to pay for it.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My grandkids.

1530

Mr. Rod Jackson: Grandkids. This is ridiculous. This is an action—maybe you’re afraid because it’ll hold you, as a cabinet minister, accountable for not being able to balance your own budget. Is that what you’re afraid of? I don’t know, but certainly it’s time for us to take this seriously. If you can’t see that this is an attempt to make a serious, real try in making sure that debt and deficits get wiped out and that people understand in the province that the government is here for them and that, “Hey, if we don’t get the job done, I’ll take a hit.” Do you know what? If something different happened 10 years ago, let’s get over that. We’ve got to move forward together. Do you remember that? Let’s do that for a change. Let’s move forward, work together, get the job done, eliminate the debt and deficit.

Let’s hear what you guys have a plan for. Let’s hear your plan to do that—a real plan, not a fake one, not your window dressing stuff; a real one. You guys: I’m waiting for your plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Cambridge, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don’t think two minutes will do justice on what the reply would entail. I will say that I want to thank—sincerely thank, actually—the members from Kenora–Rainy River; Kitchener–Conestoga; Trinity–Spadina; Chatham–Kent–Essex; Timmins–James Bay; Barrie; my good-old seatmate, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry; and also the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the government House leader, for their comments on this bill.

I don’t know how I can express what I’m feeling right now, because this bill is about trying to assure the people of the province of Ontario that we finally understand the gravity of our fiscal and jobs crisis. They talk about the fact that this bill doesn’t do any harm and is inconsequential. Well, if that’s the case, at the very least, pass this bill and finally tell the people of Ontario that we’re prepared to roll up our sleeves and get the job done of fixing our fiscal and jobs crisis. Clearly, what I’m hearing today from the other two parties and their caucuses is that they’re not prepared to do that.

I do take exception to what the government House leader has said in terms of his commentary and his narrative on the budget. If we’ve learned anything today it’s the fact that the Liberal and NDP caucuses have actually rejected our bills sight unseen. Other than the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, who joked about the kind of legalese—and he’s a lawyer—about what’s written in that bill. We actually have to spell out what a deficit is because this government really doesn’t understand what a deficit is. If he can’t handle that, I’m sure, as a cabinet minister, he’s going to work really, really hard to figure out when revenues exceed expenditures. It’s really the mathematics that we’re looking at here. I thought that was a totally ridiculous contribution to this debate, and he should apologize to the people of Ontario for it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We’ll take a vote on this at the end of regular business.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

Mr. Smith moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 28, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 28, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur le commerce électronique.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand here in the House today and debate—oh, this is the second reading of the Electronic Commerce Amendment Act, and I move that we have second reading of that bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Now you can debate it.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you for your lead on that, Mr. Speaker.

It really is an honour to stand here and speak to Bill 28, the Electronic Commerce Amendment Act. It's something that's long overdue in the province of Ontario. As a matter of fact, it has been introduced already in many jurisdictions in the world and many right here in North America and in Canada as well.

I'm also extremely pleased to recognize a number of members of the Ontario Real Estate Association who are here from the greater Toronto area, and many that have been here over the last couple of weeks as well to support this bill, which just makes a lot of sense.

This bill is really a testament to a lot of good political work—some good political footwork that has been happening on the ground here. The real estate association and the realtors across the province have met with me several times, including here at Queen's Park and at my office in Belleville as well—members of the Quinte real estate association. I recall, about 16 months ago, meeting with Doug Peterson, who is a well-known realtor and a former president of the Quinte and district real estate board back in the Belleville area. He goes by @realtordoug1 on Twitter, and he's probably following here this afternoon.

Sharon Shortt, from the Quinte and District Real Estate Association, was here as well just a couple of weeks ago when this bill was introduced at first reading. She's a member of the PAC for the Ontario Real Estate Association as well. They've been doing a lot of good work and explaining to us what it's going to mean to them for us to remove this bit of red tape that's interfering with business.

I would also like to thank a very well-respected member of the Liberal Party, Yasir Naqvi—he's now the Minister of Labour—who was a co-sponsor the first time I introduced this bill in the Legislature in the last session before prorogation. I spoke with the Minister of Labour earlier this morning, and he assured me that despite the fact he won't be here today, he's still 100% behind this

bill. The realtors in the Ottawa area, in our nation's capital, are very much looking forward to this bill being passed today. He assured me that he's spoken with the member from Peterborough and all the other caucus members on the government side and in cabinet, and he's very confident that they are going to have this bill passed and send it to committee later today. So I look forward to your support on one of our three bills here today, anyway.

Ontario just simply can't operate at a competitive disadvantage any longer. When it comes to the use of electronic signatures, that's exactly what we've been doing here in Ontario. It's time to move into the 21st century.

We in Ontario are competing with Alberta and competing with British Columbia for skilled workers and new Canadians. Whether we'd like to believe it or not, how easily we are able to complete real estate transactions in this province is a factor when people are looking to buy new homes and locate here. We can change that today by passing this bill.

Thirteen years ago, when a PC government actually first brought in the Electronic Commerce Act, we were at the dawn of the digital age. We had e-commerce laws that were relevant in the era of the beeper. You may have had a beeper back then, Mr. Speaker—I'm not sure—but we've moved from the beeper. No one carries one of those anymore.

Few people would have conceived of the advent of the app or the ability of a real estate agent to go a whole day fielding offers and exchanging emails with other agents without ever even going into their office to do their business, but that's where we are right now in Ontario. Ontario's real estate sector entered that world years ago, but they've been saddled with electronic commerce laws that just haven't kept up. The age of the beeper has been pushed aside and we're now in the age, of course, of the BlackBerry, the iPod and the iPad.

Now, there were some legitimate concerns raised at the time about being able to make electronic signatures secure here in Ontario. I recall being in the newsroom at Quinte Broadcasting as the news director there. It seemed like we were often reporting—this was back in the early 2000s—about a new computer virus that had taken over a computer. But secure technology, which seemed to be a pipe dream back then for even email, much less real estate transactions—is simply not the case anymore. We've evolved. Things are secure. So many of the things we do are done online and with secure signatures.

Software now exists that can ensure the security of every electronic signature; in many cases, making them more secure than the signatures we currently use to make real estate transactions in person. Electronic signature software now has the ability to perform several functions that ensure safe and secure transmission of our information. The software now exists to allow individuals to sign or initial documents when it's appropriate to do so.

Software can also authenticate users so that different users have different abilities and access to different

functions and information when signing documents electronically. Safeguards are in place that time-stamp every action on a document so a user can track when an edit or signature was added to the document. Technology that powers the real estate sector in this province is leaps and bounds ahead of where it was when we first drafted our e-commerce laws here in Ontario.

In addition to the security features that I have already listed, many programs now also encrypt documents and flag any changes made by users since their last log-in, so that anyone with access to the document is able to see what change was made and actually see who made that change as well.

The security for these systems is this high for a reason, Mr. Speaker. Purchasing a home is a huge milestone in a person's life. It remains one of the key moments in their life. It's an accomplishment for many people to ever be able to move their family into their first home. It certainly was for me when I moved into 82 Prince of Wales Drive in Belleville with my wife.

This is part of the experience we should rightly be trying to protect for homebuyers, and that's why I know that the real estate sector is incredibly supportive of ensuring that the move to electronic signatures is made in the safest and most secure way possible.

1540

The reason that we have to do this, Mr. Speaker, is because the world is leaving us behind. As I mentioned off the top, 30 European countries now allow the use of electronic signatures on real estate deals—that's 30 European countries. Most of the provinces in Canada allow this as well. Many passed legislation similar to Ontario's more than a decade ago, but, either through amendment or regulation, have followed up with the changes necessary since then. Many states in the United States have likewise made the transition from paper-based real estate transactions to electronic signatures.

Just think of how much easier it's going to be to complete a real estate transaction by making this amendment to the act today. We're not reinventing the wheel. As a matter of fact, in this, as in many things, sadly, Ontario is simply trailing the pack.

Over the last few years, housing has kept Ontario's economy afloat. New housing construction and the buying and selling of homes are responsible for the fact that this province isn't deeper underwater than it currently is. Those sectors have buoyed what a terrible economy we have here in Ontario right now. The industry has received little thanks from this government over the years. As a matter of fact, the real estate sector had to wait years for Ontario to catch up to most of the rest of North America and Europe when it comes to this simple electronic signature ability. Their partners in the home-building sector, as well, have been forced to fight numerous impediments from this government like the new trades tax that's going to make it much harder for builders and contractors to do business here in Ontario.

The Ontario economy right now is a body operating with one good lung, and the Ontario government seems

to be smoking about a pack a day or so and not making it better. I can tell you, as the red tape critic and the small business critic for the PC Party, red tape is strangling business in this province right now, and that's a sentiment that seems to get lost in this building. Red tape strangles business. This is one simple way, by allowing realtors this ability, to start to move the economy forward faster.

Many of our realtors in this province are small business people. In fact, as the Ontario Real Estate Association likes to point out to me, the smallest real estate board in the province is actually in my riding, up at the north end in beautiful cottage country. It's the Bancroft and District Real Estate Board. Many of us in this House know that our realtors are small business people. In my riding, we have small brokerages in Picton and Marmora with a ReMax. We have a very large office with Royal LePage in Belleville.

Every one of those agents and brokers go out there every day to put their client into their next dream home. Like any other small business person, they're trying to put food on their family table as well. The real estate sector is highly competitive. In such a highly competitive atmosphere, real estate agents and brokers need every chance possible to succeed, and that means that they have to be able to access documents for one client while they're in their car trying to show a house for another one.

There are currently 386,000 pieces of regulation here in Ontario. There are over 600 government agencies, boards and commissions. Even by the standard of over-regulated jurisdictions, Ontario is an overregulated jurisdiction. What we have in Ontario is a government that believes in a culture of regulation and overregulation. We've got agencies with regulatory authority that may be responsible to ministers they don't have to consult with before introducing new regulations.

We have more than just tens of thousands of regulations, though; we have hundreds of thousands of regulatory rules that are attached to individual regulation. That adds layer upon layer of red tape to the everyday duties of small business people here in Ontario. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that the average small business owner spends between eight and 10 hours a week dealing with regulations and red tape. That's more than one business day.

We were having lunch today with some of the realtors, and they were talking about the red tape that they're having to deal with, filling out these government documents. This bill is just a necessary first step in cutting some of that red tape.

If we start relying on private member's bills like this one to cut through the red tape in the province, it's going to be years upon years upon years before we have the overregulation problem under control. What we need in Ontario is a government that understands the needs of small business. We need a government that understands the reality that small business owners and operators, like our realtors, face when they walk out their front door

every morning to try and sell somebody their dream home.

Changing a bill is a good first step, but what we really need is a complete culture change here in Ontario when it comes to red tape.

In closing, I would like to ask all members of the House, regardless of party, of course, to support this bill today. It just makes a lot of sense. It's a sensible solution for a problem that we're facing in the real estate sector in the province. Again, Mr. Naqvi is 100% behind moving this bill to committee and making it law. It's going to update Ontario's electronic commerce laws. It's going to allow us to keep pace with the 30 European countries, it's going to allow us to keep pace with the other provinces and it's going to allow us to keep pace with the United States, which already have this ability.

I'd like to take this opportunity just to welcome a couple of people here. We've got Cynthia Lee, Henry David, John-Mark Roberts and Nita Kang representing the Toronto real estate sector; Maria Roque, who is here from Thornhill; Thomas Letour, representing the Mississauga real estate sector. Matthew Thornton and Yuliya Khraplyva are here as well from OREA, and I thank them for their support. Hopefully, we'll all do the right thing to make their lives a lot easier.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to stand in support of the bill from the member from Prince Edward-Hastings. It's also an honour to talk about small business, quite frankly, in this chamber. It's very, very rare that we do.

I point out to those who are watching and those who are our guests here that there actually used to be a minister responsible for small business and that that cabinet post has been eliminated. I think that shows you the focus of this government, because, quite frankly, small business really has very little in common with big business. It really doesn't.

I come from a family of entrepreneurs. My son owns a successful coffee shop not far from our house, I owned my own business at one point, and our problems are not the problems of the Walmarts, not the problems of the big insurance companies. In fact, we're in contradiction to the problems of banks—banks usually are our problems. And nobody addresses small business, so, again, it's a welcome change.

We need to do more for small business, just generally. I love real estate personally. I'm one of those people who doesn't play solitaire when I want to waste some time on the computer. I go through MLS listings; I'm not alone, I know. I'm like most Ontarians: My equity is tied up in my house, in the bricks and mortar of my house. That's my major investment, so of course I keep tabs on it. The only time I've actually lost money investing was not in real estate but in the stock market, and I probably share that with most Ontarians.

I know my real estate agents, and my real estate agents know me. In fact, in some ways our jobs are similar.

We're the people who know the communities, we're the people who talk to our constituents, we're the people who listen to our constituents about what our constituents need and try to respond to them.

A very clear fact that we need to get across: 90% of all jobs in the province are created not by big business but by small business. We are the job creators, you are the job creators, and anything and everything we can do to help you is what we should be doing. Again, that fact gets overlooked by this chamber.

I want to tell you that the New Democratic Party has an excellent track record. We had the lowest small business tax rate of any of the parties. We put it forward. The Liberals kind of met us halfway—they didn't come as low as we did. But, again, it's because we recognize that Walmart, that the mall is not Main Street. We are the party of Main Street, and Main Street, as we know, in our smaller municipalities and in our bigger municipalities, is suffering. We need to do everything we can to help Main Street.

The mall, the big business, it looks after itself. We should be taxing them more, and that's what we've said in the New Democratic Party, closing up those large corporate tax loopholes and steering that money where it creates jobs; not giving it to them and hoping it will trickle down, but making sure a small business profits so that they can actually create the jobs that then produce more jobs in the future. That's the focus, and that I see, quite frankly, lacking across the aisle. I don't see that focus on small business and really the incredibly important role it plays in our economy.

You heard the member speak, of course, about electronic signatures, which is what this bill is about, and I want to come back to it. This is a no-brainer. Of course, we're going to support it. I expect we all will support it. We should have done this years ago. I'm just in the process of renegotiating my mortgage, talking about real estate—very good timing, I might add. By the way, talking about renegotiating my mortgage—great rate. I wonder a little bit, as the federal budget comes down, what the cousins of the party to the right are going to do about that, because I don't see how real estate, small business and/or consumers are going to be helped by higher interest rates on mortgages. I don't get it. But maybe in some of their time, our friends to the right in the Conservative Party can talk about that, because that's something that their federal cousins are looking at. We don't think it's going to be very profitable for those who are buying real estate, or those who are selling it either.

1550

At any rate, there are many, many pages of documents when you're dealing with a mortgage, as we all know—many pages of documents. It's a pain. I don't have a fax machine at home; many people don't have fax machines at home. An electronic signature would make it that much easier to transact business. I might say—and of course, this is why bills should go to committee and be discussed—I would want to look at some other venues of business too where electronic signatures should be put

into place as well. I'm going to leave a few minutes for my colleague here from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, who's a lawyer, and he's going to talk about those, I hope, because I think that electronic signatures actually could be useful in other venues as well as real estate. But this is a start. We've got to do it; get it to committee. Maybe we can broaden the scope of the bill and make it useful in other venues as well.

Small business: 30 European countries have this. It's a no-brainer. Let's do it. It's kind of sad it even has to come to the floor of the House, actually. It's almost a regulatory thing that we would hope the government would have done.

Let's talk about small business. I'm just going to take another couple of minutes because it's such a rare opportunity. Again, I thank the member for focusing on it. It's very rare. I would beseech the government: Half of your members are in cabinet now; why doesn't one of them have the dedicated task and responsibility of focusing on the well-being and the health of our small business that creates 90% of the jobs in the province of Ontario? That should be the dedicated responsibility of someone; that is an incredibly important role. How do we help small business? Back in the day, we used to give grants, start-up grants—not even loans but grants—to good entrepreneurs who had good entrepreneurial ideas. We used to give them money to help them out because we knew we'd see that money back in taxes; we'd see that money back. But nothing like that is on the horizon.

I know my son—my daughter, too—started a small business. My son started it with his own money; he saved up his own money. As a young person coming out of college—because there are no jobs for college graduates; we've heard about that a lot in this chamber. I guess, as an aside, it breeds entrepreneurs. Coming from an entrepreneurial family, he started his own business, borrowed money, paying it back, managing to pay the rent, feed himself and hire many employees to help run that business. It's a success, touch wood, but again, where's the help? There's no help from the government whatsoever—no help at all. In fact, his tax rate is going up, up, up, both municipally, provincially and federally. It's not looking good; it's hard. And, as you heard the member say, he spends a lot of his time filling in forms, sending off forms.

This is not what he should be doing. What he should be doing is what his business does best—Capital Espresso on Queen Street, by the way, if you ever drop in—making the best espresso in Toronto. That's what he should be doing. He shouldn't be filling out forms or having to have one of his employees fill out forms for hours a week. That's not what he should be doing.

Again, I ring with the member and I wonder why, on that side of the aisle, we can't put a little bit more emphasis on helping. These are our young people. These are the lifeblood of our communities. This is what makes our small towns to our big cities vibrant. It's not the big business; it's the small business.

I'm going to stop with that. We're going to support the bill. We think it's good. It will be fun to talk about it at

committee, and it's always fun to talk about small business. Hats off to our real estate agents, who are responsible for most of the equity in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Minister of Innovation and Research.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Research and innovation, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand in this House today to speak to Bill 28, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000. I would like to thank the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr. Smith, for introducing this private member's bill.

As Minister of Research and Innovation, I understand and respect the importance and responsibility this House has to keep our legislation in step with technological advancement and innovation. In fact, our new government, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, has proposed the deletion of the exception from the Electronic Commerce Act as part of its proposals for a 2012 Open for Business bill.

The Electronic Commerce Act, 2000, sets a standard for the legal use of electronic communication in most areas of Ontario law. This act removes barriers to the legally effective use of electronic communications. It aims in particular to remove barriers that arise from the use of language in statutes and regulations that were created before e-communications became widespread. Provisions like a requirement that the document be in writing or signed or in original form could raise questions of whether an electronic document could be valid. Questions also arose whether contracts could be made electronically, especially by automated means.

The act implements in Ontario the Uniform Electronic Commerce Act adopted by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada in 1999 and now enacted in all the common-law jurisdictions of Canada.

The Ontario act provides that where the law requires a signature, an electronic signature satisfies that requirement. While the 2000 act resolved the issue, the act, however, does not require anyone to use or accept electronic documents.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to go into some detail for this House about the kind of exemptions addressed in this bill.

The Electronic Commerce Act, 2000, does not apply to certain kinds of transactions or documents. It does not apply to transactions for the transfer of interest in land where transactions require registration. An example includes sale and leases for more than three years. Clause 31(d) of the act excludes "documents, including agreements of purchase and sale, which create or transfer interests in land and require registration to be effective against third parties."

The Ontario government, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, has proposed the deletion of the exception from the Electronic Commerce Act as part of its proposals for a 2012 Open for Business bill. We are very supportive of this idea. Since 2000, Ontario's electronic land registration system has been extended across

the province. Mr. Speaker, people are comfortable dealing with electronic documents. Ontario's Land Registration Reform Act says that an electronic document that conveys an interest in land does not have to be in writing or signed. In this context, the present amendment repeals the exclusion of land transactions from the Electronic Commerce Act.

The validity of an electronic document is clarified. The rules of the act about time and place of sending and receipt would apply as well.

This amendment will not affect the Teranet-based electronic land registration system, which has a separate legislative framework.

The present amendment also provides for greater certainty that the act applies to electronic information and documents whenever they were created, before or after the act comes into force. This is the same rule that has always applied to other documents under the act. Well-accepted rules of the e-commerce act will now apply to land transfers, allowing the real estate industry to modernize its transactions.

Mr. Speaker, there is a great benefit to using electronic documents. They are easier and cheaper to access, to store and to manage than paper documents. Also, electronic agreements of purchase and sale improve transaction efficiencies and reduce the time required to complete the deal. Real estate clients will also benefit from electronic documents, as they will be able to file documents electronically.

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While I support the spirit of this bill, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000, there are a few drafting concerns related to the bill that can be debated about during committee. As Minister of Research and Innovation, I understand and respect the importance and the great gains that can be made with technological advancement and innovation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: For too long, Ontario's electronic commerce laws have been allowed to languish behind the evolving technology trends in our society. That's why I'm proud to stand in the Legislature today to support Bill 28, the Electronic Commerce Amendment Act, as introduced by my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings.

This act, if passed, would bring electronic commerce laws out of the Stone Age and into the age of the BlackBerry and the tablet. We need to update those laws and, as the MPP for Nipissing, I'm proud to be part of the team that's working to lower red tape burden on hard-working realtors.

Many of the realtors that I talk to often spend hours at a time outside of their office, taking clients to showings, attending open houses and networking to build their business and their brand in their local community. As a result, they're often forced to contend with the need for hard-copy signatures on real estate sale and other transfer documents.

I know that I don't need to tell the real estate industry, especially those here today, that Ontario has been experiencing some tough economic times as of late. As Ontarians become increasingly conscious of their household debt and the ever-increasing red tape burden imposed on the construction industry by this government, new home construction has slowed and, as a result, realtors are starting to feel the pinch.

Making this change to allow them to do their jobs more efficiently and in a timely manner can only help commerce and, as a result, our overall economy of the province. I'm proud to say that members of our caucus are working to lower red tape burden on small business owners in this province.

Today, we're putting forward one example of our commitment to further cutting red tape by introducing the Electronic Commerce Amendment Act. By passing this legislation through second reading today, together we can take a step toward turning around the economy of this province and giving our real estate sector a much-needed boost at the same time. That's why I urge members of all parties to stand with us and support Bill 28 when we vote on this later this afternoon, and I would like to once again congratulate the member from Prince Edward-Hastings on this very innovative bill that he has crafted. I congratulate him for doing that and look for their support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's a pleasure to rise and to add my voice to the discussion. When reviewing Bill 28, I had an opportunity to meet with some realtors as well on this matter. We spoke, and I heard their issues first-hand. The Brampton Real Estate Board addressed their issues and addressed the fact that many other jurisdictions already have this provision, where they can provide for electronic signatures. So, of course, we will be supporting this bill.

This bill makes sense. It's moving with the times, and it is an example of a bill, again, that addresses a need in our society's interest in promoting small businesses and providing them with the tools to do their business in an effective way. It's also recognizing that where sometimes we have our doubts about the benefits of technology—I'm sure many of the folks in this House sometimes wonder if the access to email and messaging and texting has actually freed up our time or made our lives more busy. But in this circumstance, there's no doubt that allowing for electronic signatures will certainly make the job of being a realtor easier, make the process of purchasing property and land simplified and more efficient. I think it just makes a lot of sense.

It also begs the question why we had to resort to a private member's bill to get to this point. I agree with the member from the Conservative Party when he indicated that certain initiatives like this shouldn't have to be brought forward in the form of a private member's bill. We'd like to see some initiative on the part of the government to enact some of these types of standard

“moving with the time” legislation without the need to bring forward a private member’s bill.

I think, and I echo some of the comments of my colleague from Parkdale–High Park, that our priorities in this province should be job creation. And the reality of job creation is that small businesses are one of the major driving forces for employing people in any economy, but particularly in Ontario. We should make that a priority and have steps in place to look at the problems that small businesses face and provide ready and quick solutions to those.

Beyond just the steps and the procedures that small business have to go through, we should also look at a progressive taxation system for small businesses. I look to Manitoba and I think of the example where we have small businesses taxed at an absolutely different rate than the multi-billion dollar businesses and incorporations. I think that’s a progressive and a meaningful way of looking at taxation for small businesses. I think we should employ these types of policies here in Ontario that small businesses see a 0% corporate tax rate up until \$500,000. That would be a great initiative here in Ontario as well. It’s something that the NDP passed in Manitoba.

Back to this bill: I’ve spoken with my colleagues who are lawyers, and they also support this initiative. There are a number of other industries or areas where we can actually employ electronic signatures, and we should visit those. As my colleague from Parkdale–High Park indicated, in committee we should look at other industries or other areas where we can actually expand the electronic signature provision.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have to tell you, just before I get into this—we’re getting into small business policy—I’m absolutely blown away by the interesting economics of the third party: this compulsion they have to say, “There’s good business and bad business. Big business is bad business, and we should tax them a lot more and they’ll take care of themselves.” This is the absurdity of the 50-year-old economics of that party.

Bombardier is one of the biggest drivers of small business right now in Ontario. They demand and create for all kinds of specialized small innovation-based companies. The auto sector, which we worked to bail out and to help out, drives everything from tool and die to small businesses. Our taxes on big businesses are competitive with every other province, including Manitoba and including Alberta. If they weren’t, and if we did what the third party said, those companies would very easily move. As a matter of fact, we’re the largest automobile manufacturing centre right now in North America. But in their world, where profit is sometimes a bad word, I find that kind of interesting.

On electronic files: This is important to small business; it’s important to large business. My friend from Prince Edward–Hastings is quite correct: This reduces the friction and cost of doing business. It creates more

security in transactions, whether they’re small or large business.

Unlike the third party, we actually think there’s an interdependence between small and big business; that there’s an ecology in business. My dear friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton may want to know that our small business tax rate is 4%. That’s about 25% of the tax rate on large business. That’s about as progressive as you can get.

The other thing that they love to do, because these small businesses, whether they’re—quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the entire real estate community depends on large business. Most real estate agents will tell you that Rogers and The Bay employ a lot of payroll for a lot of people who buy a lot of their houses. Most of the real estate agents present will tell you that they kind of like governments and parties that think that people who actually create jobs are a good thing.

1610

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: God, they’re getting a little testy over there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Who let that horse out of the barn?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay, come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I am in full agreement with my friend from Prince Edward–Hastings. I think—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. Does the member for Timmins–James Bay have a problem with my request for order?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It’s very, very important. As a matter of fact, there are some interesting tie-ins here. This government set up the Ontario Centres of Excellence. It has produced, with \$5 million, 1,300 new jobs and over 200 businesses, all by students. We have introduced apprenticeship programs that have created about 120,000 jobs for young people—mostly small businesses. We’ve established the Digital Media Zone and VeloCity. We’ve established Communtech in Kitchener–Waterloo; Communtech produces one new small business every day. There’s the Innovation Factory in Hamilton, MaRS here, another one in Ottawa, another one in Thunder Bay, and they produce, almost daily, a new small business.

I don’t think the party opposite even reads the budget—which they don’t vote for. We know the official opposition decides on the budget before it’s even produced, which I think is really creative. Maybe we should have electronic budgets that virtually disappear, because whether it was virtual or real, the party opposite wouldn’t vote for it. I would hate to have a Conservative representing me as a lawyer, because they would sign something or not sign something having not read it. They will vote on a budget and they’ll want security on security, but God knows, even an electronic signature wouldn’t help

them on the budget, because they wouldn't sign it, because we know they're not going to read it. They don't read contracts before they decide to sign them or not, including the entire provincial budget.

I want to say one other thing—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. The member for Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Some of the things that I've worked on as research and innovation minister and some of the things that we've been able to do through regulation are actually a bit of a generation beyond us.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I can't even hear myself now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: You're a lucky man.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, my dear friend from Oxford.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oxford.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, Japan right now is cashless and credit card-less. We're actually moving into a world, and this is something that we should all work on together, and I don't think there's a problem—this is quite interesting, and I'm very serious about this, because I would like to work with the member opposite on this. I'm very sincere about this, all humour aside. Japan is now moving to a society where you use fingerprints, not signatures, to avoid identity theft and PIN numbers. There are countries now that actually have chips that replace our health card and our driver's licence and that. I think these are very interesting ideas that, if we explore it, could be quite positive.

The member for Timmins–James Bay, I have to give him credit; he actually reads budgets before he does it—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is such a fun debate. Thanks to my friend from Prince Edward–Hastings for putting this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If I may, I would actually like to get back to debating Bill 28, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act. It is an honour to rise this afternoon in support of my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings. It's not an overly complicated bill, but it is certainly an important amendment.

What this bill sets out is relatively simple. If enacted, Bill 28 would amend the Electronic Commerce Act to allow for the use of electronic signatures on real estate transactions and land transfers only. Currently, Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada that does not allow for the use of electronic signatures on real estate transactions. The reality is, the Electronic Commerce Act was initially passed over 10 years ago. While certain concerns about the security of electronic signatures might have been valid in the year 2000, much has changed since

then. During the intervening time, this technology has developed immensely, and thus the legislation regulating it needs to be updated as well.

Today, if we choose, we can do our banking online while riding the bus, or pay our bills with our smartphones or our BlackBerrys during our lunch break. So it stands to reason that in theory the use of electronic signatures for real estate transactions is not that far-fetched a concept and is worthy of consideration.

That being said, I do have some minor issues that I would like to raise and that will be raised during the committee stage.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask members that are having a discussion to please take it outside?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I think first and foremost, the use of electronic signatures for real estate transactions poses no higher risk to the consumer than the traditional face-to-face, pen-and-paper method. While I think it's a healthy and prudent exercise for us to always be reviewing and updating our legislation to maintain its relevance, I also firmly believe that we must do so cautiously and carefully. I'm sure that at the committee level, we will be able to solicit the advice of many varying groups and ensure that these concerns are addressed.

At its core, though, Bill 28 is a common-sense solution aimed at lowering the red tape burden in Ontario's real estate sector. Reducing red tape for our province's families and job creators should be an essential priority of the Ontario government. Regrettably, we do not see much of a willingness to do this on the part of the current government across the aisle. The Liberal government has not identified a single one of Dalton McGuinty's many spending items for postponement or reversal. Sometimes you wonder, Speaker, why they don't just understand that overbearing regulations and excessive taxes are hurting Ontario's economy and hindering job creators.

That's why I'd like to applaud the member for Prince Edward–Hastings for his concerted effort to reduce red tape and help Ontario's real estate succeed. I will be voting in support of Bill 28 this afternoon because it is the exact type of bill we ought to be considering more often in this chamber. Bills that reduce needless regulation, bills that reduce excessive government spending: These are the kinds of priorities that actually would help us kick-start Ontario's economy and create jobs in our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's with great joy I rise to discuss the bill put forth by our member from Prince Edward–Hastings. This is just another example of where government has got to get out of the way and allow us to come into the 21st century.

It was interesting, because I had a meeting with Andre Menard of Royal LePage about a year ago talking about the issue of electronic signatures and how the time and the energy spent in chasing people down to get a

signature was just a waste of time, a waste of money that the consumer actually ends up paying for.

It's time we pull ahead. There's many examples, I think. When you look at being forced to use fax machines for signatures, most people don't have fax machines anymore. That was something from the early 1990s. That's been replaced with the Internet. I think it's time that we catch up to some of these things.

It's interesting to note that we're one of only two provinces not to allow the electronic signature. I think it's time that instead of being at the end of Confederation, we start being at the front end, and we start looking at some of the best practices that are used around the province. I think we don't have to reinvent anything; this has been used in many places.

I think it's time we get out and we started looking around and looking at how we can get rid of—our PC government is committed to getting rid of 33% of the red tape. We're hindering our businesses. We're driving up costs. We can't compete.

I listened to the mayor of Mississauga this morning when she talked about how government's role is not to create jobs but to create an environment that actually allows the private sector to create them. I think we have to start looking at that.

This is a government that's desperately in trouble. It has caused great hardship in this province. We lost 48,000 jobs in January out of the private sector—good-paying jobs. Just think of the revenue we've lost. Then we have to turn around and find that money elsewhere to support education, health care, things we hold dearly and need in this province.

1620

It's just another example of the competitive disadvantage that we're working with in this province. It's interesting that my colleague talked about the age of the beeper. I think with this government, the beeper reminds me of the truck that's backing up. I think it's time that we stopped backing up and started moving ahead, getting out of the way of these people who are trying to work, trying to do something for their children, trying to earn a living, and all we are seeing is a roadblock, something that they have to manoeuvre around, something like I heard the OPA talking about yesterday, somebody working around them.

We have to worry about the bottom line. I see that we have some competitive tax rates when it comes to corporations, but you have to worry about the bottom line. Businesses have to worry about the bottom line. Taxes are only part of it.

Look at our hydro rates. I guess this party is a leader in hydro. We're number one in North America as far as the highest hydro rates.

WSIB costs: We're number one in the country; highest rates, driven up to \$19.5 billion, by our independent business reports.

This government, in nine years, has gone from \$5 billion to \$19.5 billion of deficit.

Property taxes: Again, we're number one in the country; the highest property taxes.

Red tape: When we have a government, we're promising to get rid of the red tape.

We brought these agencies down to—what?—250 under the Harris government, and this government has driven it back over 600. No wonder we've got a lot of government jobs here, just to run these agencies that get in the way of business

I enjoyed the comment about Japan being credit card-less. I think if this government was credit card-less, we'd be in a lot better shape. But you know, what's going to happen is the credit agencies and the banks are going to take our credit card, because we've been spending and not paying down the debt. We've just gotten out of control. I think it's time that you start to look around.

It's interesting when we hear the comment about us voting against the budget, sight unseen. I guess we're a party that likes to believe. We listened to the throne speech, and you told us that you weren't going to look after the debt and you weren't going to address the jobs crisis, so why wait? You've already told us what's in the budget. We've told you upfront: If you don't handle those two key issues, the key issues that the constituents of my riding are telling me, how could I vote for the budget? I would just be a hypocrite, because we talk about this as being key to getting Ontario back on track.

We've been running this province in the red since 2004-05, and it's time that we get responsible government, government that actually puts programs in place and that allows business to work and generate the revenue that will pay for the services that will make us competitive tomorrow.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I know many members are entering the chamber because we're getting close to the vote. I would ask you to take your seats quietly. There's at least 10 conversations going on. It was very difficult to listen to the last speaker, so I'd ask you to keep it quiet.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: I was very pleased. I didn't know what to expect, to be honest, when I came in here today. I didn't know which way the parties were going to go on this bill, but I'm very pleased to hear the comments from my colleagues from Nipissing and Dufferin–Caledon and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Thank you very much for your thoughtful comments. I appreciate as well the comments from the third party, from Parkdale–High Park and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—as well from the government side: the Minister of Research and Innovation and also the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The comments from the member from Parkdale–High Park really struck me when she mentioned the fact that realtors are so important to our local communities, and small business people in general are so important in our local communities, creating 90% of the jobs in Ontario.

But the realtors are very important citizens because they're some of the most charitable philanthropists that we have in our region. I can tell you that in the Quinte region, it doesn't matter which gala dinner I'm at, I'm surrounded by real estate agents. They're there supporting the causes in our community, so I think it's great that we're able to come together here today and support them by passing this very small piece of legislation. It's a tiny thing that should have been done a long time ago.

I was also struck by the comments of the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, who gave us the illusion that this government had actually done something over the last 10 years to improve the lives of small business people in Ontario. I meet with them every day, because we're the party that actually—my leader is here—has a critic for small business and red tape because we understand how important it is to make life easier for them so that they can do the business and create the jobs in Ontario.

Thank you for your support today. We look forward to moving ahead with this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

SICK DAYS ARE FOR
SICK PEOPLE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RÉSERVANT
LES JOURNÉES DE CONGÉ DE MALADIE
AUX PERSONNES MALADES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 7, standing in the name of Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 25. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a bunch of noes.

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA NÉCESSITÉ
DE VIVRE SELON NOS MOYENS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Leone has moved second reading of Bill 26. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Smith has moved second reading of Bill 28. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would ask that the bill go to the committee for general government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill go to the committee of general government. Agreed? Agreed.

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

The division bells rang from 1628 to 1633.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would all members please take their seats.

SICK DAYS ARE FOR
SICK PEOPLE ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RÉSERVANT
LES JOURNÉES DE CONGÉ DE MALADIE
AUX PERSONNES MALADES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 25. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Pettapiece, Randy
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLaren, Jack	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Garfield	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	McDonell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	McKenna, Jane	Wilson, Jim
Harris, Michael	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Milligan, Rob E.	Yurek, Jeff
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John
Bisson, Gilles	Forster, Cindy	Moridi, Reza
Campbell, Sarah	Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Horwath, Andrea	Natyshak, Taras
Chan, Michael	Hoskins, Eric	Piruzza, Teresa
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Colle, Mike	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Kwintar, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Schein, Jonah
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Singh, Jagmeet
Delaney, Bob	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Taylor, Monique
DiNovo, Cheri	McMeekin, Ted	Vanthof, John
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Wong, Soo
Fife, Catherine	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 31; the nays are 51.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can we open the doors for 30 seconds?

LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA NÉCESSITÉ DE VIVRE SELON NOS MOYENS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Leone has moved second reading of Bill 26. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Rod

Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonnell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick

O'Toole, John
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bisson, Gilles
Campbell, Sarah

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Gerretsen, John

Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.

Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad
Fife, Catherine

Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine

Natyshak, Taras
Piruzza, Teresa
Prue, Michael
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Schein, Jonah
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Takhari, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 31; the nays are 51.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. It's the first time I've seen a bunch of guys who don't want to go home.

The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "no."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until Monday the 25th at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1641.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
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
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
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	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
Vacant	Windsor–Tecumseh	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Bill Mauro
Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Dipika Damerla, Steven Del Duca
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Monte McNaughton
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
Bas Balkissoon, Rick Bartolucci
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Mike Colle, Rosario Marchese
Laurie Scott, Todd Smith
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day (pro tem.)

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Laura Albanese, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Joe Dickson, Jim McDonell
Phil McNeely, Paul Miller
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Teresa J. Armstrong
Steven Del Duca, Bob Delaney
Frank Klees, Jack MacLaren
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Gilles Bisson
Steve Clark, Mike Colle
Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Bill Mauro
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Dipika Damerla
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qadri
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Margaret R. Best, Vic Dhillon
Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Margaret R. Best
Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
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