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Tuesday 8 April 2014

Mardi 8 avril 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 8 April 2014

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 8 avril 2014

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVASIVE SPECIES ACT, 2014
LOI DE 2014 SUR LES ESPÈCES
ENVAHISSANTES

Mr. Orazietti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act respecting Invasive Species / Projet de loi 167, Loi concernant les espèces envahissantes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Orazietti: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to move second reading of Bill 167, the Invasive Species Act. Speaker, I'm going to take a few minutes to outline the benefits of this legislation, the importance of this legislation and why we need to move expeditiously on this.

Ontario's natural resources provide a significant source of jobs and economic benefits for our province. They are one of the foundations of our prosperity and they are fundamental to our quality of life. That is why we must take stronger action to address threats to our environment and to our economy. Our government must show leadership on this issue, and with this legislation that is exactly what we're doing. The proposed act builds on concerted and coordinated action we have been taking on invasive species.

In 2012, our ministry worked with the Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Environment and Transportation to develop the Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan. One of the actions in that plan was to identify legislative and policy obstacles to effective prevention, rapid response and management. Last summer, my ministry issued a discussion paper that identified gaps in different pieces of legislation that address invasive species. Those gaps are not surprising, considering that Ontario currently uses a patchwork of more than 20 different pieces of legislation—provincial and federal acts—to respond to the threat of invasive species. Those gaps are not surprising, and that is why we need to move forward with this legislation.

If passed, the Invasive Species Act would be the first stand-alone legislation of its kind in Canada. But we would not be acting alone, Speaker, it's important to

note. Managing invasive species has always been a shared responsibility—across all levels of government as well as with industry, environmental groups and the public. Ontario would continue to collaborate with all those involved in invasive species management, including municipalities, key stakeholders from across the province, and the federal government, which has an important national role in invasive species management.

Traditionally, it has been the federal government's job to prevent invasives from entering Canada, and once established, it's been the provincial government's responsibility to eradicate or detect these species. We need to do more in a coordinated way. The Invasive Species Act would, if passed, complement the role of the federal government in managing invasive species. It would promote shared accountability for managing invasive species by enabling the expansion of strategic partnerships.

Our government has built many enduring partnerships in this area. For example, Ontario is a member of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, where we work with the Great Lakes states and the US and Canadian governments to prevent aquatic invasives such as Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes. We've been working with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters for more than two decades to deliver the Invasive Species Awareness Program. More recently, we supported the creation of the Invasive Species Centre, in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, to collaborate on research, strategic planning, communications and outreach, response actions, mitigation plans and rehabilitation activities. To date, Ontario has invested nearly \$9 million toward the establishment of this centre in partnership with the federal government.

Bill 167 would support actions that are stronger, more focused and more effective. We need to act so that the future generations of this province will continue to benefit from Ontario's rich natural legacy.

Ontario's unique geography and diverse trade links put us at greater risk than many other provinces. More invasive species have become established in Ontario than in any other Canadian jurisdiction. The reality is that we are a strong trading province, globally connected to the economy. Our Great Lakes are a vast and shared resource, connected by rivers and streams to broad portions of North America.

Speaker, when it comes to invasive species, the risks are not diminishing. Climate change, as well as industrial and urban developments, are stressing ecosystems, making them more susceptible to threats from invasive species.

So here's how the legislation will assist us: The bill before the Legislature would provide the province with the tools to step up the effort to prevent, control, monitor and eradicate invasive species. This landmark legislation would, if passed, help by providing the powers to intervene early so invasive species do not become established. This legislation would give Ontario the tools to ban activities such as possessing and transporting certain invasive species. It would also allow the government to enable rapid response actions to stop an invasive species from spreading. The legislation would, when needed, help ensure compliance through modernized inspection and enforcement measures. The proposed legislation uses a risk-based approach that considers a full range of threats, costs and benefits to the environment, society and the economy.

A broad range of stakeholders have expressed strong support for further action to address invasive species. These stakeholders, from municipalities and conservation groups to industry, recognize the need for stronger action to manage this threat to Ontario's economy and natural environment.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters is the largest conservation organization in the province. They represent outdoor recreation enthusiasts who would be dramatically impacted by invasive species. The federation's executive director, Angelo Lombardo, has said this: "This is a positive step in the fight against invasive species that will compliment actions already taken by the federal government." This is a serious threat to Ontario. "The legislation being introduced by the province will provide the minister with the tools to immediately react when a new species is identified, or when a threat is identified."

Conservation Ontario represents a network of 36 conservation authorities which are dedicated to conserving, restoring and managing Ontario's natural resources. Kim Gavine, general manager of Conservation Ontario called the proposed Invasive Species Act "an important step in improving Ontario's response to invasive species." She believes that the risk-based approach we have taken "is a sound and useful approach that allows for prioritization of actions to maximize the use of limited resources."

The head of biodiversity for the Royal Ontario Museum has also weighed in. Dave Ireland, managing director, says the proposed Invasive Species Act "is unprecedented in Canada, and is a bold step by the province."

Invasive species are a very real threat. I know that my colleagues in the House from across the province have become familiar with problems of invasive species in their own ridings and in their own communities. Zebra mussels are a menace to the municipal water systems in this province, clogging intake pipes and costing the province between \$75 million and \$91 million each year to manage. Phragmites, the European common reed, is damaging beaches. Insects, such as the Asian long-horned beetle, threaten the health of our forests.

0910

And then there is the threat of species not yet established in Ontario. Northern Ontario, where the \$11.9-

billion forestry industry supports over 55,000 jobs, faces the risk of invasive pests such as the mountain pine beetle. This beetle has killed about half the total volume of commercial lodgepole pine in British Columbia and has moved east to Alberta, where it is also affecting jack pine. It's now within 50 kilometres of the Saskatchewan border and continues to move further east. In fact, in the province of British Columbia, the government has spent \$917 million fighting one particular invasive species that's a serious threat to their economy.

Asian carp also pose a serious threat. These invasive fish have overwhelmed some rivers in the United States, where they now make up more than 95% of the fish by weight in some areas. Fishing contributes about \$2.2 billion to Ontario's economy and attracts tourists from around the world. Asian carp could devastate our commercial fishing industry. It could cost tourism jobs related to the recreational fishing industry in this province. Asian carp are dangerously close to Ontario's borders already; at least, they've been found in one American tributary of Lake Erie.

Invasive species are a quality-of-life issue. Fishing and hunting are fundamental to the traditions of First Nations. For many young people across the province, catching their first fish or taking a swim in a lake or hiking in the outdoors is part of a healthy, active Ontario childhood. Ontarians from all walks of life value our natural environment whether they are camping in a provincial park or taking a walk in their local park.

It's important to understand that invasive species impact all Ontarians, wherever they live. They are a threat to the beauty of our natural areas and to all of our communities, including urban centres. Let me provide a couple of examples. The Asian long-horned beetle attacks hardwood trees including all species of our iconic Canadian maple tree. The emerald ash borer, if not effectively controlled, is expected to spread across the entire range of ash causing widespread tree mortality. In fact, in the city of Toronto, they've spent \$37 million removing and replacing ash trees. This is particularly concerning when you consider that the green ash is one of the most commonly planted species in our urban forests.

Invasive species that impact the natural environment can also pose public safety issues. The water chestnut is an aquatic invasive plant that floats on the surface of the water. It forms dense clusters with sharp barbs. It threatens native species and makes swimming and boating very difficult. The giant hogweed is an invasive plant that has become established in parts of Ontario. Its sap can burn your skin, causing blistering and scarring.

Invasive species are a threat to our biodiversity and are the second leading cause of species becoming at risk. Once invasive species are introduced into the wild with no natural predators, they can spread quickly. Invasive species often out-compete domestic species for food. They can destroy native species' habitats and, according to a 2010 report on the state of Ontario's biodiversity, invasive species are the second-greatest threat to species at risk in Ontario. They are a leading cause of extinction of species globally.

Here are a couple more examples: Invasive phragmites release toxins from their roots into the soil and hinder the growth of, and kill, surrounding plants. They crowd out native vegetation, thus resulting in decreased plant biodiversity. These tall, densely growing weeds can reach up to five metres in height, degrade the habitat and decrease food supplies for native wildlife, including several species at risk.

To provide another example, the invasive dog-strangling vine impacts the reproduction of the monarch butterfly, which is a species at risk. The butterflies lay their eggs on the plant but the larvae are unable to complete their life cycle and can't survive.

Here's how the legislation would work and why it's important that we move forward with this: The proposed legislation would accelerate the actions we can take in combating invasive species. We know that to manage invasive species effectively, we must find them early and respond quickly. That is also the most cost-effective approach. Finding new invasive species before they spread widely or become established allows us to try to eliminate populations as soon as possible. If it's not possible to eliminate the invaders, early response could also help to control species and reduce costs.

Let me provide a few details of how the proposed legislation would work to combat invasive species. It would allow the government to make regulations to list invasive species and carriers of invasive species that pose a threat. Listed invasive species would be categorized as being either a moderate threat or a significant threat to the natural environment in Ontario. Importing, releasing, possessing, transporting and other actions involving an invasive species could then be banned.

Here are a couple more examples. If a supply of wood were found to be infested with an invasive beetle, we could prevent it from being moved from one part of the province to another to minimize the impact and, obviously, reduce costs. Or Ontario could allow only Asian carp that were already eviscerated into the province.

Of course, the proposed act also recognizes that there may be legitimate reasons for possessing an invasive species, such as for the purposes of research and education. The act would obviously create these exemptions.

With respect to the regulations, Speaker, I want to be clear that no invasive species are listed in Bill 167. The proposed act would enable the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to list invasive species and carriers of invasive species that would be subject to the act.

If the act is passed, extensive public consultation would occur before any species would be listed in the regulations. Consultation would include posting proposed regulatory conditions and associated information on the Environmental and Regulatory Registries for the public and stakeholders to review and comment on. Any proposed regulations or rules regarding any invasive species would be based on risk assessments that consider environmental, social and economic impacts. Stakeholders, including industry, would have an opportunity to review

and comment on any proposed regulations or rules before they were created or enforced.

Speaker, early detection of invasive species is also key to managing them effectively. The proposed act, if passed, would strengthen inspection activity to protect Ontario from invasive species. Here is a little more information on that: We know that enforcement measures strengthen protection. In 2005, Ontario put rules in place banning the transport and possession of several live invasive fish species, including the four species of Asian carp. Since then, enforcement officers have seized more than 40,000 pounds of Asian carp that were destined for Ontario markets.

Bill 167 includes provisions for allowing strong penalties and enforcement powers to investigate violations. If a high-risk species such as Asian carp were found in Ontario, the proposed legislation would enable rapid response actions such as working with partners on control and eradication efforts. The provisions would also ensure that those responsible are accountable for the costs of control and eradication through strong penalties and cost recovery mechanisms which are important features of this legislation.

Penalties are essential to ensuring effective implementation of any act. In the proposed Invasive Species Act, there would be maximum fines possible of up to \$250,000 for individuals plus imprisonment for up to one year. Maximum fines for corporations could be as high as \$1 million. These penalties are aimed at providing adequate deterrence to potential violators. The fines may multiply in the case of multiple specimens or species, and they may be increased by the amount of monetary benefit resulting from the offence.

In addition to these penalties, upon conviction, a court may also make additional orders as it saw fit. These can include orders to remedy the harm to the natural environment that resulted from the offence.

I'd like to share the comments of a couple of stakeholders with regard to this legislation. The first is from Dilhari Fernando, who is the executive director of the Invasive Species Centre. She said, "Ontario is showing tremendous leadership with this new legislation, and is the only jurisdiction in Canada to propose such a comprehensive package of tools to proactively address invasive species. Invasive species threaten Ontario's environment by altering natural spaces and endangering the species that are native to our regions. Imagine an Ontario where fall colours are a thing of the past or where we can no longer take our families canoeing or fishing in our lakes and rivers. This could be our reality if we don't act to address the threats posed by invasive species."

0920

The second comment is from Owen Williams, president of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council. He calls our proposed tools in the Invasive Species Act "essential for responding to the growing threat of invasives."

We appreciate the support of partners such as the Invasive Species Centre and the Ontario Invasive Plant Council. As I said earlier, managing invasive species is a

shared responsibility—shared with other governments, industry, environmental groups and of course the public. In fact, everyone can play a role in protecting Ontario's biodiversity by planting non-invasive species in gardens, by never releasing bait or any wildlife into nature, by cleaning their boats before removing them and placing them in other water bodies, and by not transporting firewood. They're simple things that perhaps we overlook, but they're important in helping to reduce the impact of invasive species—and spread, of course. We need to engage all Ontarians to do their part to protect species and habitat, and we need to take a leadership role with this proposed legislation.

In closing, Speaker, I'd like to be clear: Invasive species impact the lives of every Ontarian. You don't have to be an angler or a forester to appreciate our rich natural resources in this province. Invasive species have the potential to impact the quality of life of our drinking water and damage our beaches. They could decimate the urban tree canopy and have the capacity to devastate our forestry industry.

The challenge of addressing invasive species will require all the tools that we can provide. There have been successes in limiting the damage to and promoting the health of native species populations, but we have a responsibility to do more. We can provide stronger legislative frameworks to support the prevention, early detection, rapid response and eradication of invasive species in the province. That is what the proposed Invasive Species Act would do.

I'm confident all members will agree that the problem of invasive species warrants strong action and detection and dedicated legislation, and I encourage them to support this legislation.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond to the minister's introduction of Bill 167, the Invasive Species Act, 2014. Certainly, we're happy to see legislation brought forward on invasive species. We've all heard it from our respective ridings. Probably what has been in the news most is the Asian carp and its invasion, so we're pleased to see the government begin to take action on dealing with this, specifically with the Asian carp. The minister mentioned in his comments that the fishing industry is a \$2.2-billion industry to Ontario's economy. The Asian carp could very well devastate that. We've already found it in tributaries coming into one of our borders. So we've heard of these issues.

I want to comment on the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, who's going to speak next, but also our MNR critic, the member from Oshawa. They have both testified in the US about the impact of invasive species on threatening our livelihoods, our quality of life, as the minister said, and our environment. So bringing in legislation to deal with invasive species—and I know I mentioned mostly Asian carp, but some of the other invasive species were mentioned by the minister: zebra mussels, emerald ash borer, round gobies, and I know he men-

tioned a lot of plant species. It depends where you live, what species is affecting the area that you represent.

But early detection, eradication—I'm pleased to see there's going to be some teeth in this, with some enforcement, some fines, some possible jail time. It's an incredibly serious issue for us in Ontario, and I'm pleased that the Liberal government has actually brought a piece of legislation in that we will be supporting. We can't wait till it actually gets to committee, because I think there are many more stakeholders who do want to comment on that. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for my time.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to thank the minister for bringing forward this important government bill, Bill 167, the Invasive Species Act. But again, it's one of those feel-good bills, because the bill doesn't address hiring any new enforcement officers or putting any money in the budget to actually do enforcement. I spoke to this issue yesterday under the family leave bill. It's fine and dandy to bring in new bills, but if you don't actually put the dollars in place to ensure that there's enforcement, what good is it?

The bill says that inspectors may conduct inspection activities to determine compliance. They may issue stop orders if they believe an offence is about to be undertaken. They may issue orders for up to 15 days for a particular species, and I understand there are at least around 200 or more endangered species in the province. Conservation officers, under fish and wildlife, are inspectors, but the ministry can appoint foresters and biologists.

But the bill doesn't speak to how many we are actually going to appoint. Are we going to be hiring any additional people? How much money is the government going to put to this bill to ensure that it gets implemented and that it's going to make a difference for the endangered species and for wildlife in this province?

We, the New Democratic Party, and our leader, Andrea Horwath, look forward to getting this bill into committee so that we can put forward amendments that will certainly strengthen this bill and, hopefully, make it a good piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Minister for Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: This is really a piece of legislation that—I'm encouraged, actually, to hear the comments from the members of the opposition so far that indeed they are in support of this legislation. It's almost impossible to explain just how important this is. I think we should all applaud the Minister of Natural Resources for bringing this forward and for recognizing the kinds of measures we need to take legislatively to deal with the extraordinarily big challenge we have, related to invasive species.

Again, it's not just the province of Ontario. It's wonderful that we will be the only jurisdiction in Canada that has stand-alone invasive species legislation, but there's no doubt—the minister referenced it—that this is not just a provincial matter. It's a national matter, it's an international matter.

When one speaks about the economic impact of Asian carp entering into the water streams in Ontario and the Great Lakes, it's quite frankly unimaginable. The work that is being done in that regard involves international jurisdictions and the US as well.

I have the experience of having spent some time as Minister of Natural Resources as well, and I know how committed the ministry staff are to making sure we do the right thing. I applaud the minister.

I also want to do a bit of a shout-out to organizations all across the province. I think of Trees Thunder Bay. I think of the work that they're doing. I happen to be related to the Thunder Bay city forester, who, when I was minister, taught me a great deal about the emerald ash borer and how important it is to keep it away from or out of the parts of the province it has not yet gotten to, because the impact is profound.

Congratulations to the minister. A strong legislative framework is necessary to enable the prevention and the early detection—and the education of the public—in terms of how we deal with invasive species.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to see the government introduce this kind of legislation. The world has changed; it has gotten a lot smaller. Invasive species that are not natural to our environment, to our part of the world, find their way here in many, many ways that were not possible years ago. I am glad that they're doing something about it.

We have got to ensure that for non-natural species like the Asian long-horned beetle, the emerald ash borer, the Asian carp, and zebra mussels, which we have been dealing with for years—we have to make sure that our response to these invasive species is swift and meaningful. Half-measures will not do. These species do not have natural predators or natural enemies here. They have them where they came from, but they don't have them here. We have to ensure that our response to these invasive species is something that is massively done. We have to eradicate them before they do further damage to us.

Our fishing industry is under a great threat from some of these invasive species. If the Asian carp gets into our Great Lakes system, we're in big trouble. That's a \$2-billion industry. We cannot allow these species to take over this part of the world. We have to make sure that we have the measures in place, we have the tools in place—and I appreciate what the minister is doing—that we can take really strong action. This is not something we can be timid about. We can't namby-pamby around this and talk about, "Oh, we might do some damage to a lovely little fish or something." No. These species do not belong here, they are not natural to our environment and we have to take the strongest measures possible to protect the species that are part of the ecosystem here. Otherwise we're in big trouble. I'm not mincing words here: We need to act fast and we need to act in the strongest way possible as soon as possible.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Welland, as well as the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, sharing their comments on this issue, which I think we can all agree is clearly a non-partisan issue. This is an issue about protecting our natural resources and protecting our environment. We know that these species that are invading Ontario pose very real threats to both our economy and our quality of life.

We've seen what's happened in British Columbia with the mountain pine beetle and the incredible devastation to the forestry industry, with nearly a billion dollars spent on attempting to eradicate one species.

But we are spending money in Ontario today to combat these various species. I mentioned the emerald ash borer in the city of Toronto, \$37 million; up to \$95 million on zebra mussels. The federal government spends \$29 million on the sea lamprey. The list is beginning to lengthen and cost additional resources.

It is so important that we break down the silos and ensure that both internationally and in Canada, at all levels of government, we are working effectively to develop the best strategies. Early detection is key to reducing costs. Our government invested in the Invasive Species Centre because of the concentration of scientific knowledge in our community, in partnership with the federal government, to do exactly that.

I certainly recognize the concerns of the members opposite as well, and many of them have been very supportive in their comments. The member from Haldimand–Norfolk is going to speak on this issue; he did at first reading and expressed his support for this. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, from the NDP, did express his support as well.

I'm optimistic that this legislation will move expeditiously through the House so that we can put this in place as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak about Bill 167, the Invasive Species Act, 2014. Let me start off by saying that as it stands at this particular time, I don't believe that our party will be opposing but will be supporting the legislation. We haven't received all the input from all the stakeholders that are out there, but any of the stakeholders that we have been in touch with are certainly supportive, and as such, so will this party be at this particular time.

There are many aspects of this bill that need to be brought forward and discussed that haven't been brought forward. I'll take it on a line-by-line basis. The minister just briefly mentioned some of the aspects that we're talking about. The cost for zebra mussels: He mentioned the \$95-million fee on the zebra mussels alone, but I

don't necessarily know if the minister has checked with groups like Ontario Hydro, for example, which have probably spent in excess of \$95 million alone on zebra mussels to clear the intake and the outflow water pipes on an annual basis from our nuclear plants.

When I brought in a bill in 1999 to deal with ballast water discharge, to specifically deal with species that were coming in, there was about a 29%, if I recall—a study showed that in 1991, 29% of the releases of invasive species coming into Ontario were through ballast water discharge. We tried to deal with that particular topic because, as I recall, there was one—I think it was the comb jellyfish—that came in from the Black Sea and it was tracked down to one specific ship that had come into a port in the States. Once it released its discharge of ballast water, it had introduced the new jellyfish, and there had been a substantial die-off of the recreational fishery in that particular state. I think it was Michigan where it finally got in and started to infiltrate into the Great Lakes at that time.

Some of these things that need to be addressed and some of the areas that we need to talk about are how the government can move forward on addressing this bill.

If you go across Canada, you'll see there are many species that have come in, like Dutch elm disease. If you go into western Canada—I was in Saskatchewan last summer, and at that time you would see all these bags—yes, the Clerk would remember—around all the elm trees. It was to try and stop Dutch elm disease from killing off all the elm trees in Regina. They have a huge program out there.

Some of the other aspects are the impacts of things such as the pine beetle in western Canada, whether it's in BC or in Alberta. We need to talk about some of the impacts there, because it's had a substantial impact on the Ontario economy alone. People don't realize that now, all of a sudden, we have this huge die-off. In BC and Alberta, the pine beetle came in and killed all the trees, or the forestry sector got permission to cut down all these trees before they got wasted away. They were standing, rotting trees, so there was an additional cut that was allowed out there.

What that did was it increased the amount of dimensional wood that was produced in BC and Alberta that's now shipped all over North America, and Asia and other markets as well, that we are competing with on a regular basis. But because the tree is going to go to waste if it's standing and slowly rotting, they reduced the cost for it, or they reduced the amount of stumpage fees or the amount—and the sheer numbers of the volumes of the cut that's allowed—the minister would know the allowable cut in the province of Ontario. The millions of cubic metres have substantially increased, and not only that, but some of these trees that are cut dimensionally are now brought into Ontario at a reduced rate, competing with the Ontario tree and forestry sector.

So if you look out there—and this is what the forestry sector is telling me. In some sectors, some of these trees have made it back in and are now competing with On-

tario wood, because it's a reduced-rate wood that's processed in BC and Alberta. So we have to look on a Canada-wide basis at what's going to take place.

In some of the previous research that I had done, groups like the Federation of Ontario Naturalists had identified three specific types of invaders. There were natural invaders, accidental invaders and intentional invaders. Some of the natural invaders were some of the opossum or the white-tailed deer that slowly migrated north into Ontario and started to become resident. I can recall back in the early 1980s, maybe late 1970s, being in a place called Foleyet, which is basically halfway between Sudbury and Timmins; that would be best for the average Ontarian to understand where it is. At that time, when I first started going there, there were never any raccoons in the area. Now you'll regularly find raccoons because they've slowly migrated there; the same with the coyote and a number of other animals that have been listed as what would be classified as a natural invader.

Then we have what the FON—Federation of Ontario Naturalists—at that time listed as accidental invaders, such as what happened in 1959, when the St. Lawrence Seaway was opened up. It allowed the sea lamprey to come into the Great Lakes. The difficulty there, and everybody knows what's taken place and the huge amount of costs that take place—I think it is \$29 million, if I remember my figures correctly, that the federal government and the other jurisdictions pay just to control the number of sea lampreys in the province of Ontario. I can tell you, you know when lampricide is going through the streams because all of a sudden you see all the turkey vultures accumulate along the stream ways, feeding on those dead carcasses of the sea lamprey. It's certainly something that's necessary. It devastated a lot of the fishing industry, and I can recall—as a matter of fact, we don't understand a lot of the impacts.

One of the individuals we inducted into the sports hall of fame was a swimmer from Oshawa who, at the youngest age, was swimming across Lake Ontario. Part of her discussion was about how, when she got out of the water, there were about half a dozen sea lampreys attached to her.

These are things that people don't realize about these accidental incidents or invaders that have taken place and how they impact the economy, whether it's recreational fishery and the devastation that's done there, which is a huge industry in the province of Ontario, as well as other aspects, and we've already mentioned some of the ones with the pine beetle.

You talk about the emerald ash borer beetle and what has taken place there. The minister mentioned that and mentioned the amount of funds being spent in Toronto alone dealing with the emerald ash borer beetle. When you talk about that, you see how municipalities—and I know the Minister of Northern Development and Mines was speaking on the bill as well, and it was good to hear that. In his own community of Thunder Bay, a discussion had taken place by the developers about the canopy that they're required to plant when they're putting in new

subdivisions. This is all taken into consideration, and we have to understand how this great picture comes together. What happens now is, if you look at the amount of trees and the types of trees that developers are required to plant in their developments, they reflect the impact of such things as the emerald ash borer beetle.

In Oshawa, for example, we only have—I can't remember the specifics; I believe it was less than 10% of the canopy is ash trees, which are now being hugely impacted by the emerald ash borer beetle. What's taking place there now is the replacement of these trees and the spreading of the beetle. The beetle effectively goes in—bores in, just like it says—and what it does is, the larva eats its way around the tree. It does something called girdling. A bark works like a skin or a vein, and between the bark and the tree, you get the flow of the nutrients or the sap in the maple trees in the spring. For those that don't know, birch trees do the same thing and can be harvested, as they do in western Canada. But the girdling that's done by the emerald ash borer beetle effectively kills the tree and stops the sap from flowing up. That's how it works.

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So there are two methods by which they can deal with this, and it's very costly. Depending on the girth of the tree—the larger the tree the more applications are required—they will do a syringe injection of a fluid that kills off the beetle, which is very time-consuming and very costly. Each injection is about \$100. Some trees will take two, three or four various injections in order to kill off the beetle. What they try to do with this particular borer beetle and the injection is, they try to have it so that, as the beetle is moving through the community, they protect those trees. The injection lasts for about two years and stops the emerald ash borer beetle at that particular point, killing them off. It stops the migration of the tree bud.

As we constantly see now, they try to stop individuals from taking firewood through different parts of the province, or wood as a whole. But how are you going to stop the forest industry from dealing with what has gone on? It's in the millions of cubic metres that is transported throughout Ontario, whether it's hardwood in the veneer mills or the SPF, the spruce-pine-firs, in the slicer mills that they produce. It's difficult to contain all those on a province-wide basis when you're dealing with such huge industries.

We look at methods by which we control this. One is the injection of this fluid to stop the emerald ash borer beetle with that particular hardwood. Another one is a rather toxic one, according to the individuals I met with and discussed it, where they use basically a fertilizer type of material that is absorbed through the roots. But it's so toxic to the other plants that it basically kills everything else in that area in order to try and stop the emerald ash borer beetle. So there's a couple of ways that it's done, but it's very costly.

The municipalities are now putting out a huge amount of dollars—tax dollars, quite frankly—that the taxpayers

have to pay in order to protect these trees. The same thing has happened in the past as is taking place in Regina and other parts of western Canada, Manitoba, with Dutch elm disease and them trying to stop Dutch elm disease and protect their elm trees. So we try and react in many of these cases.

It's the same with purple loosestrife. I can remember taking the kids out and going into the Second Marsh in Oshawa, picking all the purple loosestrife and putting it into the bag, containing all the seeds and making sure it got disposed of. All that did was slow the process by which purple loosestrife was expanding in the province of Ontario. It was a great attempt and was a learning experience, but it's very costly. We're looking at these methods by which they come in. There's a number of methods by which they come in. My understanding was that purple loosestrife effectively came in from florists, who were providing a great purple flower in their arrangements which is now distributed throughout the province of Ontario. Lo and behold, we have purple loosestrife now entrenched in the province of Ontario, and it has a significant impact on a number of sectors.

But there are many ways that we get affected. The stats on that comb jellyfish: That was introduced by a single ship. In 1999, within six years, it had reduced the fish harvest by 90%. We don't realize these things that come in, but it can be attributed—actually, at the time that I presented this bill, I had all-party support, which was great. But as we know, private members' bills have a lack of tendency to move forward, so it's great to see that the minister was able to bring this.

I was asked to present before the US Senate committee, and the shipping industry was not too happy, because the comb jellyfish could actually be attributed to one specific ship. What I tried to do was make them responsible for the cleanup. And I see that the penalties in here for it up to \$1 million for the first incident, in order to cover the costs for cleanup—sort of the introduction.

There's one section of the bill that I hoped the minister would make note of where I had a little bit of concern in the way the legislation was brought forward. It should come to committee, and we want to make sure that is addressed in regard to the introduction. It was specifically stating that, under section 8:

“Prohibitions, moderate threat invasive species,

“Introduction, deposit and release

“8. (1) No person shall,

“(a) Bring a member of a moderate threat invasive species into a provincial park or conservation reserve,” and then it breaks it down farther on. But I think it should add the words “knowingly or intentionally.”

Later on it goes into due diligence, as expressed in the legislation. But knowingly and intentionally bringing something is far different than somebody who has a bait bucket—whereby they bring a rusty crayfish, when they bought crayfish for bait, into an area, and now they're held responsible for the introduction of that species. The same thing with the round goby and other things that obviously the COs check for, to make sure that bait

buckets are not containing those sorts of things. But a lot of individuals, the first time out getting involved in the activities or sports, may not be familiar. So knowingly or intentionally introducing something would be something that might assist in ensuring that the legislation is acted out with its intent.

There are many other things that I want to discuss about the bill. Under section 4 in the explanatory note, it talks about “classified as either a significant threat or a moderate threat.” The determination—who decides which is which? It’s the breakdown of where it comes in—and is there a review body which determines at what level the threat is specifically included?

We very much appreciate the inspections and the warrant that is required to enter a place or dwelling. However, when you go into the legislation later on, there doesn’t appear to be a warrant required for entering properties that may contain some of the invasive species. We have some concerns about—sometimes there will be a CO, for example. If I remember correctly, the way it’s worded here, the CO is an inspector immediately, by position, and I would assume there would be training for that. But the CO can also designate an individual to come with them. Some communities would be concerned that the designate might be an OPP officer who might be checking for other aspects and doesn’t have permission to enter properties. We constantly hear, in opposition, and when we had that privilege and honour to be in government, about how COs work with MTO and the OPP and were doing things like, under a CO’s non-requirement for a warrant, to check whether people were using coloured gas or not—diesel. We want to make sure that the real intent of this is specifically targeting invasive species, which we all support—to ensure it is not taking place in the province of Ontario.

There were a number of other areas. We’ve gone through the bill and made note by note. I’ve slowly walked through it, picking out some of the spots that I wanted to deal with.

The publication of the order: It’s to be notified, so it’s good that, by a newspaper in general circulation of an area, people are informed about a species coming in. For example, in Oshawa I’ve sent out notices to households. They were completely unaware of the emerald ash borer beetle, yet they have monstrous 100-year-old ash trees that could be affected. They had no idea of the requirement for protection. I remember one particular incident where I notified—they had an ash tree which is just magnificent. It’s probably about this big around in regard to size. The difficulty with that is that it’s close to the house. The emerald ash borer beetle was in the area, because I know where the testing was, and I happened to see some of the trees that had been affected. This individual wasn’t really fully aware of what was taking place. The cost to have a crane come in and remove that tree would probably be in the tens of thousands of dollars in order to remove a tree that’s that close to the household, whereas it would cost probably \$300 every two years to maintain it until the emerald ash borer beetle

had run its cycle and is no longer prevalent in the area. In that way, it would save the individual huge amounts of dollars. So it’s important to have notification.

It goes on that a posting would take place when an area is found to be contaminated with an invasive species. It’s important to ensure that the neighbours are notified of it as well, because the impact on them is going to be quite substantial. As much as Oshawa tries to get the message out, it’s difficult for everybody in those particular areas to become aware. I realize that the costs of dealing with this could be rather significant. However, the cost of not dealing with it would be a lot more for individuals—to have to pay to have these trees removed or replaced in their yards or their properties, because it is quite costly—and the impact, as well, on the forest industry. We spoke about how the pine beetle affected western Canada and how we are impacted, and the forestry sector is seeing some of that impact here. But as well, ash trees are very good for many construction uses, whether it’s handles—ash handles are very popular—or in a number of other areas. So if it’s utilized correctly, how would you be able to process those materials into functional aspects of society while the tree has died without further spreading the emerald ash borer beetle around? These are some of the things that, hopefully, the ministry is taking into consideration: how they can address some of the very specifics.

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I think that back in 1999—I’m not sure if I had mentioned—to date, to 1999, there had been 140 exotic species or invasive species that had come in, which included the ruffe, round goby, zebra mussel, purple loosestrife and many others in the Great Lakes. Something else that has to be taken into consideration is working with the other jurisdictions, whether it’s Quebec, Manitoba—quite frankly, we are the only province on the Great Lakes—but with the other US jurisdictions around. When I was asked to present before the US Senate committee, they were very interested, and actually, a number of the states had moved forward with legislation to address the very issue of ballast water discharge because of the impact on their communities as well. Working relationships and ensuring that the federal government comes forward in playing a partner in this is very important as well. The minister mentioned the sea lamprey and the cost for that particular program, but as well, if we look at the impact on the fisheries and the commercial fisheries from the other states, it’s important that we all work together in ensuring that it’s all taken care of to the best of our abilities.

I had mentioned the purple loosestrife, and there were huge attempts to try and reduce the amount by going out and hand-picking—making sure the seeds weren’t spreading. There was a beetle that was developed by the ministry to go in and try to reduce the numbers, but then again, it’s an intentional invader, as I mentioned earlier, which can be used to counter some of the actions of things like purple loosestrife or beetles introduced to kill off the plant. We have to make sure this beetle doesn’t

become a problem later on. It's like that great Dr. Seuss book where, in order to get rid of a mouse in the house, they eventually bring in things to counter it. It ends up that how they get the elephant out of the house that chases the lion out is to bring back a mouse. The whole grand circle of things and how we as a society are impacted by these sorts of things—we just have to make sure that the eventual outcome of introducing species to address these particular invasive species is not something that becomes problematic in the future as well.

There are many other things that have taken place. For example, in—I can't remember which airport in New York state it was; however, a flock of parakeets got accidentally—during a shipment that was going to pet stores—released, and now there's a self-sustaining flock of parakeets that are only found in Central and South America that are now in New York state at the airport. They've become somewhat of a sight, these parakeets that are now there. They have self-sustaining populations, and guess what? They're slowly expanding, much as other species that have come forward.

There are other species as well that have been introduced, whether it's the ring-necked pheasant or the elk that has been reintroduced into province of Ontario or turkeys or a number of other things that have been brought back intentionally. I recall some of the reasons—the minister would well know that one of the reasons that they were not going to release wild turkeys onto Manitoulin Island was because of the fact that the wild turkeys ate bugs, and there's a very special leafhopper on Manitoulin Island that they were concerned would be negatively impacted once the wild turkeys had moved into that area. Also, I can recall the discussions in the past that we were given—as the former Minister of Natural Resources—about the expansion of the turkey flocks and the release of those in the province of Ontario. There were some strong concerns that if we released them into certain areas, they—these are intentional invaders as listed by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists—would negatively impact other species in the particular area. When that takes place, the guidelines that the ministry had established were, what were the traditional boundaries of the wild turkey, for example, and they tried to maintain those traditional areas that wild turkey was native to in the province of Ontario.

However, as we mentioned about the white-tailed deer slowly expanding its territory in the province—and I can recall in the 1970s when there were more car-deer collisions in New York state alone than there were of the entire deer population in the province of Ontario—it slowly expanded farther and farther north so that the populations of deer have moved forward. The position at that time in the ministry, which we tried to influence, was that we need to make sure that these areas are specifically taken into consideration. If the deer are expanding, so would the turkey range, because they kind of countered each other or dealt with each other; as the deer expanded, so should the range of that.

We very much appreciate the need for a warrant in dwellings. However, as I expressed earlier on, we have a

strong concern about the use of warrants for properties as a whole. As I read the legislation—unless the minister can say otherwise—a warrant is not required to enter a property, only a dwelling on a property. So this allows inspectors—and the CO is listed simply by their job as an inspector on this—access to any properties that they deem fit. The difficulty is the individuals that they can deem as assistants to come on with them. Could that be an OSPCA—Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—individual coming on board?

I know the member from Peterborough—knowing his rural community, some of the farming community would have concerns about those sorts of things happening, and establishing guidelines or the ability to ensure that the correct individuals—that the intent of the legislation is being followed out. Many times we bring these things forward, and the intent sometimes happens to open up doors to other activities that cannot be part of the intent.

I mentioned the notification to the surrounding properties, to ensure that it is done in the best way we can so that the individuals are notified of it and realize the impact, and I realize the minister is moving forward in the best way possible. I think we have a significant amount of support in many aspects of this. We want to ensure, as we continue on with globalization, what takes place, that we're not exposing ourselves to many more diseases and insects, as such, coming forward.

Some of the aspects, as well—when you read the legislation, there doesn't appear to be any funding specifically allocated that's going to be there to ensure that what needs to be done gets done in the province of Ontario. I realize the ministry is trying to look at ways of cost recovery. We constantly read petitions, because there are some strong concerns about the hunting and fishing regulations not being readily available to individuals there and accessible to individuals. It's very difficult, as we've stated in the past—how an individual would be on a boat and be able to gain an understanding, on that particular lake, what the specific catch requirements or limitations are, and we want to make sure there are enough funds available to ensure that the people who are going to do the job have the necessary requirements and the funds to make it happen.

In summary, Madam Speaker, there are a significant number of things that we've tried to bring forward: the aspect of warrantless entry on properties, not dwellings, is good; the use of an appointed individual to come on with it; to ensure that there's adequate funding; to make sure that we look at other jurisdictions and not become solely dependent—we have to work with the federal government to ensure things on international trade. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency—most don't realize they handle a lot of those things. When the emerald ash borer beetle first came into Ontario in—I believe it was around Windsor, Ontario, and slowly expanded from that area—the belief was that it came in on skids. So when they were making skids, the skids had been infested with eggs or with beetles. The skids were not ensured to be insect-free, and they moved forward. It was the Canadian Food

Inspection Agency that was handling most of that, to try to deal with it in that particular area. It hasn't been successful. I know there were huge cut-offs of many of the trees in that area in order to stop it. We have it in Oshawa; we have it in a number of areas as well.

It's the same thing with some of the pine beetles, whether it's western Canada or some of the European pine beetles that have come in and are attacking some of the forests here. We need to make sure that we work with the other jurisdictions, not as an independent or as an island but in the best way that we can all work with all the jurisdictions on behalf of all of the people of the province of Ontario.

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Madam Speaker, I'm going to be sharing my time with the member—I want to make sure I get all aspects of his riding correct—from Haldimand–Norfolk. I've left a significant discussion about the Asian carp, because it's something my colleague wants to discuss. He has a strong passion for it and has been speaking on it on a number of occasions in a number of locations—the impact of the Asian carp and how that's going to affect many of us.

We need to work together, and I think we'll continue to do so. With that, Madam Speaker, I'll free up the time for my colleague to continue on with the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 167, the Invasive Species Act. I thank our MNR critic for sharing some of his time with me. Jerry, as we know, is a former Minister of Natural Resources and has done a tremendous amount of work in this field, particularly on those invasives into our Great Lakes.

I think he mentioned that back in the year 2000 he testified before a US Senate committee with respect to ballast water. He presented legislation in this House, a private member's bill, to better enable us to protect the lakes on that particular front.

Mr. Ouellette mentioned that I testified recently before the US Army Corps of Engineers with respect to Asian carp. I attended the hearings down in New Orleans. My wife and I were on vacation, so I had an opportunity to spend a day over there.

The US government and various state governments are doing a tremendous amount of work on Asian carp. It's incumbent on us in the province of Ontario and, of course, the federal government to step up to the plate as well, because they are on their way. It is a clear and present danger.

I found that in New Orleans I got a whole other perspective. In one sense, I was about as popular as a snake at a garden party, because the other 12 presenters represented the shipping industry—the tow tug, the barge industry on the Mississippi—and the crucial aspect of that industry to access the Great Lakes through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Here again, when we deal with legislation like this, we're taking on Mother Nature, which makes us all understand how complex this is. When you bring in a

law, there's no guarantee that the possums, the white-tailed deer or the coyotes that have arrived are going to obey our law. They're subject to the law of Mother Nature, as we are.

With respect to the shipping industry, they made some very good economic points. We have to be careful just on this one species—well, there are several species of Asian carp. If they get into Lake Erie, does that mean we shut down the Welland Canal? I don't think that's going to happen. We have to be cognizant of this when we see groups calling for the shutting down—essentially, the hydrological separation of the Great Lakes from the Mississippi basin at Chicago. I call for an ecological separation, and we can continue to do that through electric current, for example; sound vibration; the use of chemicals. Mr. Ouellette made mention of the use of lampicide year after year to fight the sea lamprey.

The jury is still out on how best to deal with that particular group of invading species, the Asian carp. The grass carp are in the lakes now, and the big concern is the silvers—these are the jumpers—and the bighead carp.

I do want to go back to another area. There has been made mention of stakeholders that have an interest: the bait industry; agriculture, of course; forestry; and the ornamental plant industry, the greenhouse growers, where we get our flowers. We heard mention of purple loosestrife. Those greenhouses are going to be open for business in another matter of weeks. I don't want to make any predictions, but it looks like spring is finally here.

Just by way of example, first off, I want to point out a very clear and present—a very close—example of what we're dealing with here. I ask the members present: The next time you walk out the front door of this Legislature, take a walk over to the southeast. There is a gigantic, beautiful maple tree. It's one of the biggest maple trees you'll see anywhere in this part of Toronto. It's not a sugar maple; it's a Norway maple. It's an invasive species. There may be a reaction. I have a Husqvarna. I'm not sure what brand you use, Jerry.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: STIHL.

Mr. Toby Barrett: He's a STIHL man; I'm Husqvarna. I used to run Homelite. That's old-school, I guess. Sure, you can pull out a chainsaw and cut it down. You can hit the shoots with an herbicide. That's one approach, but then there's the other side of it. What kind of a furor would there be if we were to cut that invasive species down on the front lawn of the Ontario Legislature? It's a city tree. They are trees that have been brought in. They're kind of an urban street tree. A number of years ago, they were used to replace the dead elms from Dutch elm disease. Again, like so many invasives, the roots arrived from Europe in the mid-1700s for use as an ornamental.

That particular tree isn't a problem. It's surrounded by asphalt and traffic. It's really not going to take over downtown Toronto. However, if you take a look at the beautiful ravines in Toronto known for their wildlife, many of these famous ravines are now infested. There is virtually nothing else apparent. You don't really see anything else growing under the canopy of Norway

maples. It's just as much of a concern, or should be just as much of a concern; the Norway maple is just as much of a concern in Toronto as the Norway rat, for that matter.

If I'm going to talk about wildlife in the city of Toronto, of course, there are too many raccoons. I personally think there are too many squirrels in the north end of Queen's Park here. There are some solutions for that, and one very good solution is the red-tailed hawks that we have around here. Again, we can pass some laws, but Mother Nature can kick in and help out as well.

As far as that particular tree, or other trees, you can cut it down. Shoots can come up. We know that since April 2009, we all have to obey regulation 63/09 of Ontario's Pesticide Act. I know that the minister made mention of other ministries that have a stake in this legislation as well. We know that with that particular regulation, there are exceptions for agriculture and forestry. There are provisions to use some of these products with respect to invasive species control.

Here's another example—again, going back to this category of ornamentals. If I were to look out the front door of my home, I look across my field—it's normally soybeans—about a quarter of a mile at the far end of the field is another maple. I didn't plant it there. It arrived from somewhere. I've planted some white spruce in that area. They're also an introduced species, I think, the same as the Colorados. What I have over in that corner is a Manitoba maple. I've left it there. I can control around that area; we farm around that area. I never considered it a concern. As far as maples, it's not, obviously, my favourite tree.

If I look to the west, again, just out the front door of my house, and I look to my pond—the ice is slowly coming out of that pond. For 15 years I've watched phragmites forcing out my cattails, and I've been in an all-out war with phragmites. I've tried just about everything. My specialty is Roundup. You can't spray over water. I use a long-handled paint roller, where I flatten the leaves of the phragmites. In September you do it when the fronds are out, and then roll it. I know MPP Monte McNaughton has done a considerable amount of work on this phragmites battle down in his part of the country.

The minister made mention of the Ministry of Transportation. If you drive down Highway 402, going west of London, you'll see nothing but phragmites on Ontario government MTO property, from there right down to the Michigan border and further south, down towards Amherstburg and that way. I know there is a call certainly from my riding to have phragmites declared a noxious weed; that may be one approach that we could take.

Applause.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I hear a round of applause for that one.

Look to the left out my front door: English ivy, climbing 40 or 50 feet up my black locust. English ivy that gets out of control—is it an invasive species? The black locust itself was brought up to our part of southern Ontario by original pioneers who came up from New York and New Jersey. You see an awful lot of black

locusts down in the US northeast. It's a wonderful wood, great firewood, makes great fence posts. It's great habitat for the various woodpeckers and nuthatches that get the insects out of the twisted bark of the black locust. It's a wonderful, wonderful tree. It fixes its own nitrogen, by the way, just like soybeans. So 40 feet up it's covered in English ivy; it's looked great for years. Then we had this hard winter and there's nothing but dead leaves and it really doesn't look that attractive. It does provide a habitat for the smaller birds. I just wonder how that can affect, say, the insects getting into the bark and how that's going to affect the food supply for the nuthatches.

Down below those trees is goat weed. I put in a rock garden; my wife planted goat weed and it took off. You can't even see the rocks anymore. Across the lane is periwinkle that we planted on our steep slopes that we can't mow. Some of it got dumped on the other side of the laneway. It's heading through my bush. It probably won't reach my father's bush, where the trilliums are, because it's got to go across Cockshutt Road. But again, periwinkle has been identified as an invasive species, and it can get out of control.

Across the lane and throughout much of my property just in the last few years there's garlic mustard. I don't know who brought garlic mustard here a hundred years ago. I understand part of it was for medicinal purposes: to use for ulcers, for gangrene, as a source of vitamin A and vitamin C. So I suppose we have a situation now—why pay, I don't know, \$12 for a bottle of vitamins? You can go out and grab some garlic mustard. I invite anyone here, if you want to come down to my farm and pull garlic mustard, you can have it for free and get all the vitamins that you want.

You can pull out those phragmites, if you want to give it a try. Those things are impossible to pull out or to dig out. They're very tough. They're something like burdock or teasels. I've spent decades fighting these kinds of weeds.

Here's the kicker: Just south of my house a number of years ago I planted Russian olive. It's identified under the invading species hotline. I'm going to read out this number, by the way. Invading species hot line: You dial 1-800-563-7711. The Russian olive is identified on the hotline. I planted them. Guess where I bought them? I bought them from MNR. I bought them from the St. Williams Forestry Station, Speaker. So again, new evidence, new knowledge comes along and it just lets us know—I have a feeling our time is up—that we can pass laws but we're also dealing with some of those laws that have been dreamed up by Mother Nature. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. It is 10:15 of the clock, so this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that my critic the member for Oxford is going to want to do some introduc-

tions as well; I will begin. In question period today we have, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Keith Currie, who is the vice-president; Paul Wettlaufer, who is the director of zone 2, from Bruce and Grey; Peggy Brekveld, the director of zone 15: Algoma, Cochrane, Dryden, Kenora, Manitoulin-North Shore, Nipissing east and west, Parry Sound, Rainy River, Sudbury east and west, Timiskaming and Thunder Bay; and Larry Davis, director of zone 3, from Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk. Welcome to OFA and all the other candidates.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford: You can carry on.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the members from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who are here today to talk about how to grow Ontario's agriculture industry. In the gallery we have Peggy Brekveld, Paul Wettlaufer, Larry Davis, Keith Currie, Ralph Brodie, Drew Spoelstra, Don McCabe and Joe Dickenson. I would like to welcome them all to Queen's Park. I would hope that we all meet them in the dining room this evening at their reception.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I would like to introduce some new friends I made this morning. I have Seamus Morrin; his mom, Arleen Morrin; and his sister, Erin Morrin, from Brampton. Seamus is aspiring to become the Premier and Prime Minister.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am very pleased to rise to introduce and welcome to the chamber Miss Italy, Giulia Arena, who is here, together with Marcello Cambi, Italian journalist; Luigi Fioravanti, Italian photographer; Tony Pavia, Italian photographer; and Gino Cucchi, my constituent and the president of Comites. Welcome to the chamber. Benvenuti.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Today is Burlington day at Queen's Park. It is my honour to stand here today to introduce the mayor, Rick Goldring; his chief of staff, Jackie Isada; councillors Rick Craven, Marianne Meed Ward, Blair Lancaster, Jack Dennison and Paul Sharman; city manager Jeff Fielding—it keeps going—and his assistant, Leah Bisutti; Scott Stewart, Helen Walihura, Ian Cameron, Donna Kell, Bruce Zvaniga, Allan Magi and Joan Ford. Thank you so much.

Mr. John Vanthof: On behalf of the NDP caucus, I would also like to welcome the directors of the OFA here today, especially my director, a very good friend of mine, Peggy Brekveld.

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a lot of guests today. I want to start with the students in grade 10 at Dr. Norman Bethune, who are visiting, along with their teachers Ms. Rimell and Ms. Stojanovski.

As well, I have a lot more guests visiting, starting with the College of Trades: Mr. David Tsubouchi, CEO of the College of Trades—all of us know who he is; Pat Blackwood, vice-chair of the College of Trades; Gail Smyth, executive director of Skills Canada Ontario; John Norris, Collision Industry Information Assistance; John James, stylist; John Grimshaw, IBEW and Construction Council of Ontario; Fred Black, representative from the Electrical Contractors of Ontario; Chris Paswisty, Sheet Metal

Workers' and Roofers' Conference; and Vince Kacaba of the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, as well as all the trades-people who are visiting Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: I too would like to welcome the directors of the OFA—my great director is Paul Wettlaufer, from the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—and, of course, Miss Italy.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I would like to welcome Ana Mateus, who's at the back there. She is a social work student from Ryerson University. She has had a placement in my office for virtually a whole year. It has been a great pleasure to have her working with me in the constituency office.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to introduce Brian Maloney, who is here from Kingston.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to introduce two members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture from my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex: Mr. Don McCabe, the vice-president, and also Ralph Brodie, a past president with the Kent Federation of Agriculture.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: We are going to be visited shortly—you just ran by them when you came up. They are from Israel and they are with the Diller teen development program from Eilat, Israel. There are 22 of them and they will be joining us shortly.

Mr. Steve Clark: I too want to thank all the directors of the OFA, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, for being here today and I want to thank them for their unwavering support, Premier, in keeping agricultural education at Kemptville college.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's moments like that that make it difficult for me to introduce guests, when we are asked to simply introduce our guests. Thank you.

The member from Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Brent Royce, a member of the OFA from my riding of Perth-Wellington.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I think I heard her name previously, but my constituent from the OFA is here as well, Peggy Brekveld, and I'd like to welcome to her to the Legislature today.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to welcome Bruce Buttar from the OFA to the Legislature today. Welcome, Bruce.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome Gino Cucchi from Comites and from the St. Clair area business improvement association. Welcome, Gino.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is the tradition from the Speaker, we have with us today the former member for Markham in the 36th and 37th Parliaments, Mr. David Tsubouchi. David, welcome.

Applause

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): For those who may not know, David was also on the shortlist for the Speaker's Book Award for his autobiography. Congratulations on being an author.

I also would like to welcome from my riding of Brant, Mr. Larry Davis from the OFA.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Tim Hudak: The question is to the Premier. I was talking to a young man in my riding named Justin. Justin wants to be an electrician. He's finishing off high school at E.L. Crossley and he wants to get in the trades. But he was asking me why the Kathleen Wynne Liberals and the NDP stand in his way of getting a good job in the trades.

The Ontario College of Trades has locked in outdated apprenticeship ratios. They limit opportunities and they're going to charge him a new tax. If I could do anything, I want to create a million jobs in our province, I want to see Justin achieve his dream of being an electrician in the province of Ontario.

My question to you, Premier, is: Why are you standing in the way of Justin getting a good job in the skilled trades?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Before I go to the Premier, a reminder that we refer to each other either by our title, specifically our title, and the ridings. I would appreciate very much your co-operation.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We very much want Justin to have the opportunity to develop a skilled trade. I want to thank David Tsubouchi, who has taken on a leadership role with the College of Trades. What the College of Trades is about is making sure that people who work in the skilled trades have decision-making power over what matters to them. That is the professionalism that we had wanted to put in place. That's what the College of Trades is about.

I very much hope that Justin, whether he has taken part in a Specialist High Skills Major, which is a program that we have put into our high schools, whether he is looking at getting into an apprenticeship at this point in his career, whether he had the opportunity to take part in a pre-apprenticeship program in high school—there are many paths to skilled trades. The College of Trades puts that professionalism framework around that.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: That's my point, Premier. Justin can't find an apprenticeship position because you're, quite frankly, in the pockets of the special interests, including Pat Dillon, who runs a Liberal negative ad—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Withdraw, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Withdraw.

Clearly, the Premier would rather listen to Pat Dillon, who runs the negative Liberal ad campaign, where I'm

on the side of job creators and young people who want to get into the skilled trades. You know, a show I loved watching as I was going to university in the late 1980s was *St. Elsewhere*. *Grey's Anatomy* is a popular one today. You don't see a flock of doctors around one intern going from patient to patient. You see a flock of interns learning from one doctor. Last time I checked, doctors care very much about public safety. All I'm asking is to go to a 1-to-1 ratio. A mentor-to-apprenticeship ratio like other provinces, including NDP Manitoba, will do. That will get Justin to work and bring 200,000 jobs into the skilled trades. That's what I'm all about; why not you?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. I'm quite prepared—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm still standing. I am quite prepared to get attention here, but the difficulty is, I'm still hearing heckling when the question is being put from the same side, as I'm trying to get attention to the other side when the answers are given. My tolerance level will not be very high today.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton will come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The screenwriters for *Grey's Anatomy* are not the people who develop our policy. That may be how the Leader of the Opposition develops his policy, but that's not how we do it. And if the Leader of the Opposition imagines that a doctor—or a nurse or a teacher—has one mentor throughout his or her training, then that just is evidence that the Leader of the Opposition really doesn't understand how training works, and how people learn a trade or a skill or a profession. It takes many people to work with a professional, and that is the reality.

We have put the College of Trades in place. We're very grateful to the people who have taken a leadership role there. We want people in the skilled trades to have control over the important decisions in their professions.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: We know who writes your script. It's Pat Dillon and the Working Families Coalition. Honest to goodness, Premier, it's almost word for word.

Let me tell you where I get my advice from, and I'll help Justin and 200,000 people like him get good apprenticeship jobs in skilled trades. I see what Liberal British Columbia does. I see what Progressive Conservative Alberta does. I even see what NDP Manitoba does. And you know what? I hear it from employers, I hear it from young workers and I hear it from Garfield Dunlop who lives and breathes and walks—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Quite frankly, Garfield Dunlop has probably forgotten more about the skilled trades than you and I would ever know combined.

I think I've got the facts on my side. I've got jobs on my side. I'm on the side of young people to get jobs in the skilled trades, of new Canadians who want to put those skills to work in the province of Ontario. Why are you standing in their way? Why are you against 200,000 new jobs?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you who's standing in the way of progress and modernization of the skilled trades. It's the Leader of the Opposition. I'll tell you who's standing in the way of \$185 million we're investing every year in the skilled trades and apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs. It's that Leader of the Opposition, who doesn't support those investments.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Chatham, come to order.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll tell you who's standing in the way of jobs in the skilled trades, like the \$33 billion we're investing in infrastructure across this province. It's that Leader of the Opposition, who refuses to support those investments. I'll tell you who's standing in the way of apprentices across this province. It's the Leader of the Opposition, who wants the power to be able to dictate decisions in the skilled trades—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, come to order.

Hon. Brad Duguid: —rather than have the confidence in the people in the skilled trades to make those decisions.

Interjection.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex will come to order.

New question.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I don't think I've ever seen such a broad-based coalition that says we should eliminate the College of Trades so we can get people to work in the province of Ontario. Just yesterday, the labourers' international union, in fact, the largest construction union in the entire province of Ontario, agreed with us. They stand against compulsory certification for carpenters—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Natural Resource will come to order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If you're a union leader who's pro jobs and pro opportunity, I stand with you. But if you're a union leader who's against jobs, wants to restrict supply and pad their own pockets, I'm not on your side; I'm on the side of jobs and opportunity.

I stand with the labourers' international union. I stand with the small businesses. I stand with the young people who want to get into skilled trades. I stand with new Canadians who find that you're imposing this thick wall between them and a good middle-class job.

I'm clear where I stand: opportunity, hope, good jobs. Why, Premier, do you stand with the special interests?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The plan that we are putting in place is a plan to bring jobs to this province. It's a plan that points to opportunity and security.

We look at what's happened over the last few days: an increase of 13,400 net new jobs, an unemployment rate that has fallen to 7.3%. It's fallen, Mr. Speaker. Thursday we announced revised deficit targets. We'll beat the target by \$400 million. Wednesday we tabled Ontario's long-term report on the economic health of the province. We announced investment in coffee club—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Rural Affairs, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that will support 400 more jobs.

The work that we're doing on this side of the House is about creating that opportunity, moving forward, bringing jobs to the province. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition wants to make personal attacks. He's naming people in the House. That's not how we're going to function.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, respectfully, the only plan you seem to have is an exit plan for young talent who are leaving our province to head out west. I want to see that young talent get a good job in Ontario, buy a home, be able to afford to pay a mortgage. You know what? When you get a job in the skilled trades and you get a lot of experience, odds are you're going to start your own company down the road and hire more people. That's the kind of opportunity I want to see in Ontario.

I'm desperate to see Ontario working again. You're standing in the way. The labourers' international union, the coalition of job creators, young people—they're all saying, "Tear down this wall that stands in the way of getting good jobs in our province." The College of Trades has been an abject failure. Today is its one-year anniversary. This is your opportunity to hit the reset button, to say no to the special interests and yes to more jobs in our province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, come to order. Member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, will you join the Ontario PC caucus, say no to the College of Trades and say yes to 200,000 good apprenticeship jobs in the skilled trades?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to make sure that the Leader of the Opposition understands that the point of the College of Trades is to make sure that skilled tradespeople are certified to do the work that they're performing. That's the essence of the College of Trades. It seems to me that it would be a pretty precarious position for the Leader of the Opposition to take that people shouldn't be—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford will withdraw.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Withdraw.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that people shouldn't be trained to perform the jobs that they're performing. That's the point.

On the issue of compulsory certification, we believe that the decision to certify or decertify as a compulsory trade should be made by skilled people through the college. That is the point of the College of Trades.

The Leader of the Opposition knows that ratios have been reviewed—more than their government reviewed when they were in office. These are not decisions that should be made by politicians, but rather by skilled—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm disappointed that the Premier seems to exhibit such a patent disregard for what the largest construction union in the province, LIUNA, has to say. Basically, your suggestion is that they're not qualified to do their job.

We're talking about 100,000 skilled construction professionals. What you want to do with your compulsory certification is, you want to take them off the job site. You want to tell people who pick up a hammer and a saw every day that they're not qualified to do the job in Liberal Ontario. You want them to go back to school. You want to close down businesses. This is not only me saying this; this is the largest construction union in the province. You know what? I'd take what Garfield Dunlop says any day, I'd take what LIUNA says any day over somebody who's clearly captured by the special interests.

1050

I don't know why, Premier, you persist of blocking the entryway into good middle-class jobs. You won't listen to me. Will you listen to the largest construction union in the province, say no to compulsory certification and say yes to more jobs?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let's talk about what the Leader of the Opposition stands for. He stands for the right to work for less for every worker in this place. He stands for a party that denigrates the capacity of skilled trade workers to govern themselves.

Let me tell you what we stand for. We believe in the capacity of skilled trade workers, just as 44 other professions, to govern themselves across this province. We believe that skilled trade workers are up to the job of governing themselves, like nurses, like social workers, like doctors and like lawyers.

It's too bad that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't have the confidence in our skilled trade workers that we do. He wants to make those decisions himself. He wants those decisions made like they have been for the last 30 years: in smoky backrooms, in the backrooms of Queen's Park.

We're for modernizing the skilled trades. We're for giving skilled trade workers the ability to do it themselves.

Interjections.

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

New question.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. When the Premier took over the Ontario Liberal Party, she said this: "We're going to build on the legacy of Dalton." Does she still stand by that statement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely; because of the work that we have done since 2003 in our education system and our health care system. In our health care system, wait times are down, and we've got more home care in the system, more doctors, more nurses. Kids are achieving more in school. We had 68% of kids graduating from school when we came into office; 83% of kids are graduating from high school today. I stand by that record absolutely every day.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier sat in cabinet when decisions on the gas plants were made, and signed off on those decisions. She had a leadership role in the campaign when the decision was made to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. Does she agree that those decisions are part of the so-called legacy of Dalton?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have answered that question over and over and over again. I have said that there were decisions made that I had nothing to do with. There were fundamental decisions made that I believe were not the right decisions. I have said that. I have appeared before committee, and I have said that.

I have worked, since I came into this office, to make sure that all of the information that has been asked for

has been provided. The committee has had hundreds of thousands of pages of documents. The committee knows that they have the capacity to continue to ask people to come before them. We opened up the process, and we have moved to change the rules around the siting of energy infrastructure, which was at the root of this challenge.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How signing a cabinet document has nothing to do with the gas plant scandal is beyond me, but maybe this Premier can justify it.

Last February, the Premier said the following about Dalton McGuinty: "I'm proud to have been part of his government." The Premier has been at pains lately to avoid even saying the name Dalton McGuinty, despite serving as a key part of his team for 10 years. He's now referred to as "the former Premier."

Can the Premier even say the words "Dalton McGuinty," or does she think avoiding that name magically absolves her of all responsibility for the gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am very proud to have been part of a government that undid the real destruction that had been in place under the previous government. I got involved in provincial politics because there was a government in place in this province from 1995 to 2003 that had no respect for our public institutions, that undermined labour and that really changed the rules in terms of the supports for the citizens of this province. That's why I got involved in provincial politics, and the work that we have done is work that I am proud of.

Were there decisions made that I think should have been different? Absolutely. I have said that repeatedly. I have taken responsibility and I have apologized for decisions that were made, but we are moving forward. I think the leader of the third party—it would be a very helpful thing if she would talk to us about what, for example, her energy policy is—

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

Interjections.

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

New question?

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. When did the Premier become aware that the Premier's office computers had been wiped clean?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is an OPP investigation going on; I am not going to comment on an ongoing investigation. As I have said, the allegations that have been made as a result of that investigation are allegations against someone who did not work in my office.

What we are doing on this side of the House is we are letting that investigation go on, and we are very, very focused on putting in place the policies and the investments to make sure that we have prosperity in the future

and that there's security for the people in this province. That is what we are going to embed in our budget that we will be bringing forward. It would be very, very helpful if the leader of third party wanted to engage in any of those policy discussions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It would be helpful if the Premier answered my question, Speaker.

Long after the Premier took charge of the Liberal Party, her government was dismissing concerns about key Liberal staff who said quite proudly that they routinely deleted emails.

Now we know that unauthorized individuals were roaming the halls tampering with staff computers, yet the Premier still claims she is as shocked as anyone else. Can the Premier tell us how she can possibly not have known that this was happening?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reason we are having this conversation, the reason that the leader of the third party is asking these questions, is because we opened up the process. I came into this office and I said, "We are going to ask"—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I was very clear when I came into this office that those questions needed to be asked and answered, and so that is what has happened. We will continue to co-operate, obviously. There's an investigation going on; we will let that go on.

But we are very focused on making sure that we have a path forward to opportunity and security, whether it's in education or whether it's in health care. I would be happy to talk with any of the members on the other side of the House about any of those issues any time.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This Liberal Premier can try to rewrite history as much as she wants, but there's something called contempt that we all know occurred, and you can't erase that from the history books.

Ontarians want to see a government that is accountable to the people who are stuck paying the bill for government spending. The Premier can try to rewrite history, but people haven't forgotten that she was a key part of the team that steered us directly into this mess, and all of the ducking, all of the dodging and all of the denials in the world are not going to change that.

The Premier can start by answering some basic questions like: When exactly did she become aware the Premier's office computers had potentially been wiped clean?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is an entirely independent police investigation going on so I am not going to comment on that investigation.

1100

What I am going to say is that we made it clear that there were changes that needed to be made. We have worked to make those changes. First of all, we opened up the process around the questions around the relocation of the gas plants. We opened up the scope of the committee. We've changed the rules around the siting of energy infrastructure. We've changed the rules around the retention of documents. We've made those changes in consultation with people like the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That is work that we have done in order to make sure that these kinds of questions do not arise again, because the decisions that are made will be made differently.

I'm very proud of that work. I'm also proud of the work that we're doing to bring forward a budget that is going to work to ensure security—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock for a second.

Earlier, I had mentioned that the member from Huron–Bruce should come to order. I did not mean to say Huron–Bruce; I apologize. I meant to say Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who is working on his second one.

New question.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome all the people who are associated with the College of Trades and all the different tradespeople who are here today for this debate, and my friend David Tsubouchi as well. Thank you, David.

My question today is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, your latest tax grab and boondoggle, the Ontario College of Trades, is one year old today. As a communications and consultation nightmare, I don't think anything is more damaging than the fact that they are well on their way to the compulsory certification of the carpentry trade.

I have asked you in this House to intervene on this decision, and you have ignored me. Now the largest labourers' union, LIUNA—and I understand the member from Essex is actually a member of LIUNA—has asked that you put a moratorium on any compulsory certification of construction trades.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: If you're a proud member, you should have voted with me the other day.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your time is up. Don't talk to him; talk to me. Sit down. Your time is up.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Similar to his leader, the member seems to not be able to ask a question or make a comment on the College of Trades without tonnes of hyperbole, without information that's generally not correct. If you listened to the member

in the last couple of weeks, he was saying 85,000 apprentices would be out of work April 8. Well, guess what? It's April 8. There are no apprentices out of work, sir. You were dead wrong. Your credibility is absolutely shot when it comes to these issues.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I look forward to working with the Ontario College of Trades, as we all do. Some of the issues they're going to be dealing with are very challenging. They are going to have to take a very thoughtful approach to these decisions. I'm very confident that they will.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry I took too long with that first question, but the supplementary—I know that Jack Oliveira, the business manager of Local 183 from LIUNA, says, "This will drive up costs and could put thousands of our members out of work."

People are lining up fighting this. Now federal minister Jason Kenney has come out swinging against this idiotic proposal. Minister Kenney says that a disastrous decision like this warrants national attention.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Look, I'm trying to get quiet over here, and you're not helping. Everyone should be able to put a question and answer a question uninterrupted.

Carry on, please.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister Kenney says, "There is a growing concern that while most provinces in Canada are looking at ways to remove barriers to entering the skilled trades, Ontario is heading in the opposite direction—the wrong direction."

I ask you once again, Minister, to please immediately order a moratorium on any new compulsory certification of trades. Will you do that, Minister?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: What is it about the arrogance of PC politicians to think that politicians know more about skilled trades than skilled tradespeople themselves? We've seen how that's worked the last 20 years. The member wants to get rid of the College of Trades just when it's getting up and running. For some reason, he thinks that skilled tradespeople aren't capable of making these important decisions affecting their professions. We think differently, Mr. Speaker. We have confidence in skilled tradespeople that they will work in the spirit of self-governance. We do not want to do what he wants to do. He wants to bring that administration back into government. That's what I call big government tax-and-spend politics, something that I find surprising coming

from the member opposite. We believe that the people in the skilled trades will manage these issues very thoughtfully.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: Has the Premier talked to Christy Clark since New Democrats wrote a letter to her so we could ensure that Laura Miller, former deputy chief of staff, could appear at the justice committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: We had a chance to deal with this issue yesterday. The fact of the matter is that the justice committee—which the Premier asked, when she became Premier, be given very broad scope and extremely, I would say, broad powers, in the sense that they can sit at the call of the Chair and they can direct their proceedings as they see fit. They have the power and the authority to invite who they see fit to come and be witnesses. Certainly, we respect the work of the committee, and we respect the fact that they have that opportunity to call who they see fit for witnesses as they undertake this work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm glad the government respects the work of the committee. I'm just asking that they be helpful. If the Premier hasn't done it already, when will she or her staff be reaching out to the BC Liberals to ensure that Laura Miller can appear at the justice committee to give testimony?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the justice committee has the authority to invite witnesses to come forward. As any committee of this House, there are steps they can take if they feel that they're not getting co-operation from witnesses. Let's leave that with the justice committee.

We've all had our share of frustrations. As members know, earlier in this session there was a lot of frustration on our side because we wanted to hear from some of the candidates in the opposition parties: the candidates who went into the last election making the exact same promise that the government made about the cancellation of the gas plants. We heard it from the PCs and we heard it from the NDP: that if they were elected, they would undertake the exact same cancellation that we did. So there has been some frustration on this side of the House, but again, let's leave this with the committee.

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. For months, we've seen article after article talking about an alleged trades tax being forced on skilled tradespeople across Ontario by the College of Trades. We've watched anti-college groups surface, like Stop the Trades Tax Coalition. We've heard accusations, even today, from the opposition that the college is trying to put people out of work. Most recently, we are hearing allegations that the govern-

ment is forcing compulsory certification on voluntary trades.

People are overwhelmed and confused by all this negative rhetoric around the College of Trades and want some answers. Through you, Speaker: Will the minister explain to the House whether there is any truth to these accusations?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for asking such a direct question, because I think we have to be very, very clear here. The membership fee that the College of Trades is putting forward is the lowest membership fee of all the regulatory bodies across this province. What is it doing? It's paying for the College of Trades to ensure that those hard-working skilled tradespeople who go to school, who take an apprenticeship, who get their certificate of qualifications, are protected from the underground economy. That's important to those young people. We want to build a skilled trades sector that's welcoming of young people and gives them a career for life. That's one of the ways we're going to do that.

There are a number of issues that the member raised that are very, very important. Let's be very, very clear as well. The Ontario College—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm going to have to answer that in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Minister, for that great answer and for standing up for Ontario's skilled workers. I know that people will be glad to hear that the province is standing up for skilled tradespeople, especially when the party opposite is not. I look forward to continuing to help inform them on how they can become part of that process, unlike those who simply want to fight against it.

We've heard a lot today about the myths surrounding the college. Given that today is the one-year anniversary of the creation of the college, can the minister speak further on the important work of the College of Trades and what they are doing to help support skilled workers in Ontario?

1110

Hon. Brad Duguid: I certainly can and I look forward to doing that, but I want to respond a little bit to the last part of her first question, Speaker. Let's be very, very clear: The Ontario College of Trades and the government of Ontario are not moving forward with compulsory certification for any trades. That's not something that we have the power to do. That's something that ought to be put through a proper process, which is what the Ontario College of Trades is there to do. I think it's important that that's clarified.

Over the last year, what the College of Trades has been able to do is provide enhanced consumer protection so that when our grandmothers and mothers are going to the mechanic to get their brakes fixed, they know that a certified mechanic is there to fix their brakes. They are providing a form of self-governance for the trades so the trades can make these decisions themselves. They're en-

sureng that young people have access to the trades, and promoting the skilled trades, and they're protecting our hard-working skilled tradespeople to ensure that the qualifications they have are respected.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Earlier, I asked the member from Oxford to withdraw. I was mistaken and I apologize to the member. If any other member wishes to stand to withdraw, I will accept that.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdraw, Speaker.

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

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why Brianna Ames's computer was wiped despite the fact she did not work in the Premier's office until she began working for the Premier herself?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, there is an entirely independent investigation going on. I am not going to comment on that investigation. I think the member opposite knows that that is the case. I have answered questions, we have provided documentation, we have opened up the process, but the investigation that's going on is independent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, there is an investigation also being done by the OPP today, and they're probably going to be bringing more people forward. I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us if any members of her transition team, any members of her current staff or any members of her cabinet are to be contacted as a result of an Ottawa Citizen story by the OPP on this ongoing investigation. Could she please explain to the House if that's the case?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, I can't. I can't tell the Leader of the Opposition what the OPP investigation is going to do over the next period of time because it is an independent investigation. It is independent from government.

I heard of the allegations on March 27. The allegations are against the former chief of staff of the former Premier. It has nothing to do with the staff member who you mentioned. The fact is that I believe it really is unfair for the member opposite to drag staff members' names in here when there is an independent investigation going on. I think that all of us should let that investigation run its course.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. The Standing Committee on General Government is currently reviewing the Pan/Parapan Am Games. This review was struck in order to get to the bottom of all costs and to bring together all the fragmented pieces in the hope of clarifying responsibility and costs for the games as a whole. Yet the work of the committee members has been restricted from investigating the full scope of the games and something as fundamental as security.

Speaker, does this Premier agree that the scope of the committee should be so restricted?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I think the honourable member needs to be very careful. The work that is being undertaken by the committee is based on a motion that was passed by all members of the committee on November 4, which outlines the framework on which the committee will work.

I understand that the Chair of the committee made an independent ruling. That is a ruling by the Chair that has nothing to do with any party in this House. It is the Chair looking at procedural work that has gone forward. Mr. Speaker, I think he should be very careful. The committee's work, which is being undertaken, as I say, is based on the determination of the committee.

At the same time, I would remind the member that there are other committees of this Legislature that are looking at the Pan Am issue, including the public accounts committee, which has asked the Auditor General specifically to look into the security matters.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: "Obstruction" is a wonderful word.

In spite of the restrictions, we found out yesterday that the \$239 million earmarked for security is only an estimate. In other words, we have no guarantee that the costs will not continue to skyrocket, nor that we'll get the best value for the security costs. After question period today, I'll be moving a unanimous consent motion that will finally allow the committee to do their work and look at the whole picture.

Will this Premier show that she really wants transparency, accountability, and clarity, and say now that she will support this motion?

Hon. John Milloy: These are the most open and transparent multi-sport games ever. The government brought the games organizing committee of TO2015 under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I know that the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games is holding regular briefings for the media and interested members of the public. We have been forthcoming to the various committees. As I say, the public accounts committee is specifically looking into the security issue.

In terms of member's unanimous consent motion that he has put forward, I think he would agree that this is a matter that should be dealt with by House leaders, so that we don't interfere in what's going on in committees through a UC motion on the floor of the House. The committee's mandate was confirmed by the committee on November 4. There are a number of committees looking into this matter and we have been very, very open and transparent.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 21

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour le ministre du Travail, the Honourable Kevin Flynn, mais avec votre permission, monsieur le Président, en même temps je

voudrais féliciter le D^r Philippe Couillard, premier ministre élu du Québec.

Minister, yesterday Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act, was debated in the Legislature. I spoke on behalf of my constituents, but we were somewhat dismayed to witness the opposition put up speaker after speaker, possibly to drag out the clock. It's a bill that all parties support, a bill about compassion, and yet every day the bill is stalled further.

Ontarians with a family member who has a serious medical condition are missing out on the time they may be able to spend with their loved ones: critically ill children; individuals who have federal funding struggle financially, unable to access it as a provincial worker; and families whose children in fact have been murdered or have gone missing—all of these individuals are affected. To the minister: What can we collectively do as members to make sure this legislation passes quickly?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thanks to the fine member from Etobicoke North for that question. Our government recognizes the importance of giving families the time to be with their loved ones and the other positive effects that this bill can have on the lives of everyday Ontarians. That's why, on this side of the House, we're doing everything we can to move this bill through the Legislature. But with respect, the opposition parties are needlessly extending debate on Bill 21.

Listen to this: This bill has been in the House for over a year—14 different days, 22 hours of debate and 75 speakers. Listening to debate, it's been clear that the majority of members in this House support this bill. This signals that there's no true desire to have further meaningful debate on this bill and their only goal is to delay. I'm calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling. Help us pass this legislation.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Minister, as you said, we certainly respect all members' democratic right to speak on behalf of their constituents. That's their right as well as their duty. But a bill that's being delayed, dragged out and filibustered, that has a direct impact on the lives of many Ontarians, including residents in my own riding of Etobicoke North—that is not, I think, the best path forward.

We had representatives from the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Alzheimer Society of Ontario, Service Employees International Union, Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario Home Care Association, all of whom are on record as wanting this bill passed expeditiously. Yet we still watch an opposition talk about the million jobs plan and other unrelated bills, while engaging in what can be charitably called debate.

Can the minister please inform this chamber what has been the progress on this bill to date?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you again to the fine member from Etobicoke North for that question. As

I mentioned in the last response, the opposition has had ample time during second reading to discuss any possible concerns or amendments they may have. Again, the bill has been in the House for over a year—14 different days, 22 hours of debate and 75 speakers. We've had two full days of committee where there were public hearings and amendments were made.

1120

This is not the time to debate new amendments to the bill. I believe it's disrespectful to everyone that could be helped in the province of Ontario by the passage of this legislation for the opposition to continue this irresponsible filibustering.

When we voted on this as a whole in committee, Bill 21 received all-party support and it was asked to be reported back to the House for third reading. It's time to stop using this important bill that could help people to play politics. Let's get the bill passed. We need the opposition to start showing their support for this.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. People of Wellington–Halton Hills who are closely watching what's happening in this Legislature no doubt were startled to read, in the Toronto Star on March 28, no less than eight pages on the gas plant scandal, including a bombshell allegation that the former Premier's chief of staff might face criminal charges for arranging the deletion of internal government emails relating to the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants.

The Toronto Star reported that an outside person was given access to 24 computers in the Premier's office during the transition between the McGuinty and Wynne Liberal governments, just over one year ago. This is what was in the Toronto Star.

With all that has happened on this file and the recent Toronto Star disclosures, how on earth does the Premier expect the people of Ontario to give her the benefit of the doubt?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the fact that the honourable member was quoting from the media. I'd like to just remind him what the media reviews have been about the performance of his party and, in particular, his leader on this file.

From the Toronto Star, the publication that he quoted: The Leader of the Opposition “went far beyond what the facts show”—April 1, 2014. Another quote from the same date: The Leader of the Opposition is “inventing fanciful scenarios about the first days of Wynne's premiership.”

Ottawa Citizen, April 1: The PCs “asked repeatedly whether Wynne's computer was among those wiped,

which makes little sense: the police are crystal clear that they're interested in computers in McGuinty's office, where Wynne did not work."

A Globe and Mail editorial, April 1, 2014: "Ontario Progressive Conservative leader Tim Hudak is on thin legal ice." A Globe and Mail editorial, April 1: The Leader of the Opposition claimed "that Premier Wynne was personally behind any wiping of government computers"—

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: Back to the Premier: The government is quick to point out that the possible criminal breach of trust took place before the member for Don Valley West was sworn in as Premier. By taking this approach, they throw their former leader, Mr. McGuinty, unceremoniously under the proverbial bus. The government would also want us to overlook the fact that the day that the member for Don Valley West was elected leader of the Liberal Party, in January 2013, she became the incoming Premier. As incoming Premier, the power and authority and trust inherent in that high office immediately began to shift to her. She can hardly claim that she has no responsibility for the transition period while blaming everything on the predecessor whose leadership she was proud to endorse through three provincial elections. How in good conscience can she continue to blame all this on Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. John Milloy: We had the OPP appear in front of the committee, and they told us two things. First of all, this is directed towards the former Premier's chief of staff. The second is that MPPs should stay out of this police investigation.

As I said yesterday, I am pleased with and proud of the fact that the Premier is seeking legal advice in this matter. We look to the opposition to apologize and retract their statements. As I said, their critic, the member from Nepean-Carleton, has experience in it. I quoted yesterday from this news release on January 31 from the member from Nepean-Carleton, who said she was sorry for the negative perception that may have been created in terms of her allegations against Maureen Murphy-Makin or Rick Morgan "for wrongfully implicating them in an erroneous story in January 2004 revolving around the decision by former PC leader Peter MacKay not to seek the leadership of the new Conservative Party of Canada." She apologized then—

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

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Last week, the government announced that it was keeping Ontario Northland public. But at the same time, in the same announcement, it said it was selling Ontera, the communi-

cations arm of the ONTC, the one part of the ONTC that actually isn't costing the government any money.

The sale to Bell Aliant is for \$6 million, but the fibre optic ring alone, that Ontario owns, is worth \$23 million. On top of that, it will cost the government an estimated \$60 million to transfer Ontera to Bell Aliant, and 100 jobs will be lost.

Why does this government keep signing bad deals and letting Ontarians pay the tab?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I was very pleased to be in North Bay last week to announce, after a year of very hard and thoughtful work by the ministerial advisory committee, and a very thorough internal examination of a number of reports—including a management/union options report—that indeed the province is keeping the ONTC motor coach bus division; the Polar Bear Express; rail freight; and refurbishment services in public hands, something that would not have happened a year ago without the great work of the ministerial advisory committee.

We are making new strategic investments, as the member knows: \$6.2 million to purchase 11 new accessible motor coaches for the bus line, and \$17 million for the refurbishment services.

I look forward to speaking to the one line that we did make a different decision on, in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: Ontera is an integral part of the ONTC; it's part of the package. This government is paying a private corporation to take over a publicly owned business. This deal will cost jobs in northern Ontario, and it begs the question: Is this government really long-term committed to the ONTC, or is it just selling it off or dismantling it bit by bit?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I really think the member might want to be careful about undermining the very good work of the ministerial advisory committee. Obviously, Mayor Al McDonald in North Bay; Alan Spacek, the president of FONOM; Mayor Nina Wallace of Englehart; and Mayor Laughren of Timmins worked very, very hard. Indeed, the decision to keep those four lines in public hands was important.

What needs to be said about the decision on Ontera was that it was a difficult decision for us to make—or certainly for me, as the minister, to make—but I think there have been tremendous changes in the telecommunications industry. I think it ultimately came down to the fact that, indeed, I don't think it really makes sense anymore for a telecommunications company that is in direct competition with the private sector to continue to be supported by the government.

The proceeds from the sale are indeed \$6 million in cash and \$10 million in fibre optic lines. What you're not mentioning is that Bell Aliant will be providing \$15.1 million in capital investment, which we will match.

The sale is an essential part of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand; you sit.

The member from Vaughan: new question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Minister, eight out of 10 citizens own some type of mobile device in Ontario today. In my own community of Vaughan, I've heard from many residents who have issues with their cell-phone contracts. Many find the language used in these contracts difficult to understand. They also have concerns about unexpected additional charges to their monthly bills, and large cancellations fees if they try to get out of a contract. That is why I was delighted to hear that the new Wireless Services Agreements Act came into effect at the beginning of April 2014.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform the House regarding how this act will provide better protection for consumers in Vaughan and across Ontario?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'd like to thank the member from Vaughan for this question. I'm very pleased to talk about the Wireless Services Agreements Act now in force in Ontario. I'd also like to give a shout-out to the Minister of Natural Resources, the MPP from Sault Ste. Marie, for all of his tireless work on this before I picked up the file. Thank you so much.

As noted by the member from Vaughan, there has been an explosion in the use of wireless devices. However, unfortunately, there has also been an explosion in complaints about contracts for wireless services. We understood this issue, and we led the way for better consumer protection in Ontario.

Because of our swift action, consumers in Ontario can now expect clear information and fewer surprises when they enter a cellphone and wireless service contract. As of April 1 of this year, the requirements under this act must be applied to all new contracts. Now people can expect plain contracts, a clear outline of fees charged and a cap on cancellation fees.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the minister and echo her comments regarding the current Minister of Natural Resources' long-standing advocacy on this particular issue.

I am pleased to hear that consumers in Ontario will now be better protected under this act. I know many in my community of Vaughan will feel more confident entering into contracts for their wireless devices. Confident consumers result in a much stronger marketplace, and this leads to a stronger economy.

I want to ensure that residents in my community who use their mobile devices for their jobs and to stay connected with their families at home are also protected by this act. Speaker, through you to the minister: Are there options available to consumers who believe that their contract was not properly made or for those who feel that they are paying for services they did not contract for?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, there are provisions to address the concerns the member has raised. Under our new law, service providers who do not comply with the

rules must provide consumers who cancel their contracts a full refund for up to a year of service. If a provider charges for services after a contract is improperly amended, Ontario consumers are entitled to get that money back.

Most importantly, we have enshrined the rights of consumers—and I would add, strong enforcement provisions as well—when dealing with a wireless service contract. We have legislation, not a code. This ensures consumers have a law they can refer to in utilizing and dealing with service providers.

Protecting consumers and helping people in their everyday life is part of our government's economic plan, which is creating jobs for today and tomorrow. Our plan is focused on Ontario's greatest strengths: people and strategic partnerships. Our plan is working.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. It's nice that she was able to join us for question period this morning.

I suppose, though, that when you're as deeply embroiled in scandal and have as many senior Liberals under OPP investigation as the Premier has, ducking the cameras and the hard questions here in question period is probably the only strategy she actually has left. You're hiding behind lawyers, you've ducked question period. To me, to the NDP and to the majority of people in Ontario, you're clearly a government that's on the run.

But my question is this: How much time have you spent, since you were on the taxpayers' dime, consulting your lawyers when you actually should have been doing the job of Premier of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I would ask him to join me any day, any week, and follow me to the events I go to, to the people I connect with. I start my run at about 6 o'clock in the morning. I'm happy to have you there. I usually finish my last meeting with folks around 10 o'clock, and in between is packed.

I would be happy to have any of the members opposite come with me through my day.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much for the invitation, Premier. There was nobody at your event yesterday, so I can understand why you would like to have company there.

I know the Premier doesn't like being compared to Richard Nixon. The only thing she's missing, actually, is that big green helicopter on the south lawn here at Queen's Park. She employed one of the central figures in the gas plant scandal only until his name appeared in the

press. Many McGuinty staffers have actually been promoted under her watch, but she wants us all to believe that she knew nothing, and these are just coincidences. And if you don't agree with what she says, then you get served by the law firm of Dewey, Cheatem and Howe.

Premier, you're just not up to the job. You're more interested in complaining to lawyers than making hard decisions. We should be creating jobs and balancing the books in Ontario. How many other taxpayer resources are you using for your personal legal drama that's playing out here—

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

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't hurt to apologize and retract. As I said—I got cut off earlier—let me tell you about a company or an organization, *bluedraft.com*. It was a blog that was run in part by the member from Nepean–Carleton. She had to put forward this statement on January 31, 2005:

“The operators of *www.bluedraft.com*, Ms. Lisa MacLeod”—of course, the member from Nepean–Carleton—“and Chris Froggatt, would like to sincerely apologize to Maureen Murphy-Makin and Rick Morgan for wrongfully implicating them in an erroneous story in January 2004 revolving around the decision by former PC leader Peter MacKay not to seek the leadership of the new Conservative Party of Canada. We are sorry for the negative perception that may have been created since then and that may have harmed the solid reputation and high integrity of both Ms. Murphy-Makin and Mr. Morgan. We admit that our sources were not reliable and proper accuracy”—

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

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Speaker, Scarborough hospitals have been struggling to deal with funding shortfalls, as well as outdated and overcrowded facilities. They considered a merger but had to back off because of impacts on patient care, thanks to a lack of funding from this government.

Hospital management, physicians, staff and patients continue to tell this government how desperately their hospitals are in need of repairs and upgrades. But now, instead of helping, Liberal MPPs in the Scarborough area are blaming the hospitals.

Will this government stop pointing fingers and tell the people of Scarborough what is their plan to fix their well-documented problems?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I can tell you that I have met with my colleagues from Scarborough on a number of

occasions, because they are working together to improve health care in Scarborough for the people of Scarborough and Durham.

I'm not sure where the member opposite is getting her information, but I can assure you that the hospitals and the LHIN, in working with our MPPs, are determined to improve care for people in Scarborough today and in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We know that in Scarborough, hospital infrastructures are falling apart, while emergency rooms are grossly undersized for the ever-growing number of patients that they serve. The Scarborough community feels that they are being given second-class treatment as health resources are being funnelled to other areas of Toronto. Now that Liberal MPPs have started to point their fingers at the hospitals as the cause of the problem, it seems like any hope of improvement will once again be lost.

Will this government tell the people of Scarborough whether they are prepared to stop playing games, prioritize patient care and fix the problem with the hospital infrastructure in Scarborough?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would be more than happy to sit down with the member, as we have done before on other issues, to actually go through what is happening in Scarborough, because the LHIN and the hospitals are having productive conversations about how to respond to what is admittedly a need in Scarborough.

Speaker, the MPPs—I really have to stress this—from Scarborough and Durham have been working very hard to find positive, constructive solutions that will mean better care for people in that area of the province.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Creating jobs and retaining jobs is one of our government's highest priorities. In order to do so, we need to make Ontario a good place to invest for industrial companies.

Access to reliable electricity infrastructure, I understand, is the highest priority for large industrial electricity consumers, according to the Manufacturing Competitiveness Committee of the Canadian Automotive Partnership Council.

1140

Over the last 10 years, our government has made unprecedented investments in electricity transmission, distribution and generation. As a result, we now have clean, reliable and affordable systems. Now that Ontario can provide reliable electricity, energy costs are one of the next inputs that the industrial companies will need to factor in when considering whether to expand and create facilities in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he please tell this House how we can help Ontario's companies?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: First of all, I thank the member from York South–Weston for the question. The Industrial

Electricity Incentive Program is helping industrial companies in Ontario grow and create jobs. Under this new program, eligible companies qualify for some of the lowest electricity rates in North America if they expand an existing facility or build a new one in the province.

Last week in Pembroke, I announced that Pembroke MDF's paperboard plant was reopening using this program, creating 140 direct jobs plus many indirect jobs. In Whitby, Atlantic Packaging is upgrading their mill and creating 80 jobs using the IEI Program. And in the member's riding of York South–Weston, the IEI Program is helping Irving Tissue modernize and increase production capacity at their tissue mill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Helping industrial companies grow and compete in the global marketplace is an important part of our government's plan to create and support jobs for the citizens of Ontario.

It is excellent news that Irving Tissue, one of the largest employers in my community, is expanding and modernizing their tissue mill. I understand that in addition to programs like the Industrial Electricity Incentive, Ontario's updated long-term energy plan also reduces electricity costs for typical large industrial consumers by \$3 million over the next five years, and by \$11 million over the next 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could he share with this House how the IEI Program provides additional benefit, and how many jobs phase 2 of the program has helped create across the province?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed good news for job creation. Detour Gold says that the program will save them \$20 million in 2014 while they expand what is expected to be one of the largest gold mines in Canada. ASW Steel in Welland is creating 45 new jobs. Goldcorp is expanding the Musselwhite mine in Red Lake. And Resolute Canada will open a new sawmill manufacturing facility in Atikokan.

Across the province, more than 350 direct jobs in the mining, steel, and pulp and paper sectors are being created from projects accepted into this new program. In addition to creating jobs, the program benefits the electricity system by helping the province better manage its supply situation. Because the IEI Program is designed to take advantage of existing generating capacity, it will not have an impact on the costs for current electricity consumers, and it will take some of the steam out of the opposition.

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to expand the scope of the review of the TO2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games in the Standing Committee on General Government to ensure that every aspect of the games, including security, is able to be fully addressed during committee hearings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your page, please, to get this right.

Mr. Miller is seeking unanimous consent to expand the scope of the review of the TO2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games in the Standing Committee on General Government to ensure that every aspect of the games, including security, is able to be fully addressed during committee hearings. Do we agree? I heard a no.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville on a point of order.

Mr. Steve Clark: With the House's indulgence, I just want to introduce a long-time councillor in the township of Elizabethtown–Kitley and a wonderful director of the OFA in Leeds county, Eleanor Renaud.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

DEFERRED VOTES

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ACT, 2014 LOI DE 2014 SUR LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario's school system / Projet de loi 122, Loi concernant la négociation collective dans le système scolaire de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats, please.

On April 7, Ms. Sandals moved third reading of Bill 122. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McNeely, Phil
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Forster, Cindy	Meilleur, Madeleine
Balkissoon, Bas	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Milloy, John
Bisson, Gilles	Gélinas, France	Moridi, Reza
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Campbell, Sarah	Hatfield, Percy	Natyshak, Taras
Cansfield, Donna H.	Horwath, Andrea	Oraziotti, David
Chan, Michael	Hoskins, Eric	Piruzza, Teresa
Chiarelli, Bob	Hunter, Mitzi	Prue, Michael
Colle, Mike	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sattler, Peggy
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Delaney, Bob	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Dickson, Joe	Marchese, Rosario	Vanhof, John
DiNovo, Cheri	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Duguid, Brad	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fife, Catherine	McMeekin, Ted	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Pettapiece, Randy
Chudleigh, Ted	Leone, Rob	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLaren, Jack	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Garfield	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Elliott, Christine	McDonnell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	McKenna, Jane	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	McNaughton, Monte	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Michael	Miller, Norm	Yurek, Jeff
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	
Holyday, Douglas C.	Nicholls, Rick	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 59; the nays are 34.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

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

Third reading agreed to.

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

The House recessed from 1154 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TWEED TRIBUTE TO ELVIS FESTIVAL

Mr. Todd Smith: You know, Elvis has not left the building. He has just moved to Tweed. That's because every August for the last three years, the best Elvis performers in North America have made their way to the Comfort Country town on the edge of Stoco Lake to put on their Blue Suede Shoes, clear their Suspicious Minds and get All Shook Up.

The Elvis festival has become a staple of the tourism calendar in the area and, last year alone, generated \$400,000 in economic tourism activity for Tweed. Festivals and Events Ontario has recognized Tweed's Elvis festival as one of the top 100 events in the province.

For the past three years, it is an event that has only been possible because of the tireless and dedicated organizers in the community who have been able to complete the paperwork and get a small Celebrate Ontario grant that enables the festival to continue.

However, as with other festivals that are in ridings that happen to have not voted for government members, this year the festival won't be receiving funding, in spite of the previous accolades that Tourism Ontario has lavished on it. All the evidence shows us that very few festivals are more worthy than this one for what funding it does receive. Attempts so far to regain the funding haven't borne fruit.

The fact is, It's Now or Never for Elvis in Tweed. This is a community that feels it Got Stung with all the Return to Sender notices that the government has been putting on their Celebrate Ontario applications.

I call on this government to stop Shoppin' Around because you won't find a more deserving community or festival than Tweed's August Elvis festival. I'm asking the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport: Don't Be Cruel. Let's ensure that Elvis is in Tweed this summer. Thank you. Thank you very much.

FORT ERIE RACE TRACK

Mr. Wayne Gates: A few months ago, I went door to door across my riding of Niagara Falls, and I talked to many residents who had lost their jobs. Many were from the Fort Erie Race Track.

In Fort Erie, I saw first-hand that not only stores were closed down, but entire malls were closed. The residents of Fort Erie saw 1,000 jobs threatened when the slots were ripped out of the Fort Erie Race Track, and the community never stopped fighting to keep the track open and keep the 1,000 jobs in the community.

With Niagara having one of the highest unemployment rates in Ontario, it was important for all of Niagara that the track stay open. Together with the Fort Erie community; the mayor, Doug Martin; the town council; and Jim Thibert and the Fort Erie Live Racing group, we pressured this government to keep the 116-year-old track open, which just happens to be one of the most beautiful racetracks in North America.

I was in Fort Erie on Saturday and had breakfast at a new restaurant that opened just two weeks ago called Breakfast Café. I spoke with the owner, Rose, who said how important it was to hear that the racetrack was staying open, and that the jobs that go with it will help her business.

The community is excited about securing a racing season for 2014, 2015 and 2016. It's great news for the 1,000 jobs that depend on the track and for the entire Fort Erie community as it pertains to the overall health of the local economy.

Speaker, we are pleased to see that the horsemen are back at the track. The employees are going back to work. What we need now is a long-term plan to keep the Fort Erie Race Track open permanently and protect the jobs that go with it.

KLEINBURG EVENTMAKERS

Mr. Steven Del Duca: As I'm fond of saying repeatedly when I have the chance to stand in this place, Vaughan is a truly remarkable place in which to live, work and raise a family. We are a thriving region, home to some of the hardest-working people in Ontario, and we're committed to ensuring the best possible future for those living in our community.

Just last week, I was truly impressed to see a local organization known as the Kleinburg Eventmakers

provide a donation in support of the future of Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital.

Under the leadership of my good friends Frank and Arpi Greco, Richard Lorello, Tracey Kent and Carolyn Myers, this organization continues to make a positive contribution to my community. They're responsible for organizing events like the annual Zombie Walk, the Pumpkifest and one of my personal favourites, the annual holiday tree-lighting ceremony. These are events that truly bring us together and help us create and support a very strong and vibrant sense of community spirit in Kleinburg.

Their donation to the hospital is proof positive that they have great affection for their community because they've proven it by providing support to one of Vaughan's most important projects.

Speaker, I want to take this opportunity in the Legislature to sincerely thank the Kleinburg Eventmakers for their hard work and their ongoing dedication to my community.

HOME HARDWARE STORES LTD.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It is my honour to rise today to recognize the 50th anniversary of Home Hardware Stores Ltd. I would like to congratulate president and CEO Paul Straus, incoming president Terry Davis, and the 1,000 dealer-owners from coast to coast to coast on their success as a Canadian-owned leading retailer for hardware, lumber, building supplies and furniture.

Home Hardware has truly demonstrated what it means to be the "Home of the Handyman," and founder Walter Hachborn should be proud of how his idea has grown over the past 50 years.

Fittingly, our family business is almost 70 years old. I would also like to recognize my parents, Gary and Susan McNaughton, our family, my brother, Mike, and our team of employees. We're very proud to have been part of the Home Hardware family since 1980.

On this important anniversary, we're thankful to have a uniquely Canadian hardware store that serves customers well and takes an active role in our local communities—hopefully for many years to come.

I would like to offer congratulations to Home Hardware Stores Ltd. for their 50 years of outstanding service to our communities across Canada. Thank you, congratulations, and, of course, "Help is close to home."

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: On Friday, I participated in the province-wide day of action against out-of-control hydro rates in Ontario. In Red Lake alone, more than three dozen people took time from their busy lives to demonstrate against ever-escalating and increasingly unaffordable hydro rates. At the event was a cross-section of the community, including all ages and incomes. But despite their different circumstances, they all shared one chal-

lenge, which is keeping up with their sky-high hydro bills.

One participant told me that after months of barely scraping by, she examined just how her costs have increased since she moved to northwestern Ontario from out of province six years ago. She said it was a real eye-opener, as absolutely everything has gone up, be it the price of food, property taxes, the price of gasoline and, most notably, her hydro bills. She said, "It's simply unaffordable to live here."

1510

A recurring theme that I hear across the northwest is that the cost of living is so great in Ontario that people are literally being forced out of their homes and into other provinces. Speaker, this is shameful and unnecessary.

This government talks about the need for us to create jobs, but we are risking not being able to fill the jobs we've already got because people can't afford to live here.

I am calling on the government to rein in these runaway bills today by:

- stopping the \$1-billion annual subsidy of electricity exports;
- reining in and capping executive pay at Hydro One;
- reducing waste by merging Ontario's hydro agencies;
- calling on the Auditor General to conduct an immediate review of all private power contracts; and
- passing Bill 132, the bill I introduced to ban energy retailers in Ontario.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased today to tell the House about a financial literacy workshop that I hosted in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt this past Saturday, in partnership with local students and the Toronto District School Board. The workshop was called Money Matters: Helping Students Improve Money Management and Entrepreneurship. This is the second time that I've hosted this workshop, which provides youth with the opportunity to network with business leaders, meet like-minded students from the Toronto area, and learn more about personal finances. They also had a chance to learn about summer youth entrepreneurship opportunities.

We had some outstanding guest speakers and judges at this event and had the great privilege to have the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment in attendance to deliver the keynote address.

I would also like to congratulate the four winners of this year's Make Your Pitch competition: Winnie Cho, Britney Huang, Zaheen Choudry and Sharon Xu.

Speaker, this workshop would not be possible without the help of dedicated youth leaders, speakers and judges. Their commitment demonstrates the importance of supporting young people so that their innovative ideas can flourish.

It is imperative that we inspire our emerging entrepreneurs, starting as early as high school, and that we provide them with constant guidance and assistance through the various opportunities.

HOSPICE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to talk about the discrepancy between how hospices are funded in Ontario.

I want to begin by congratulating the staff and many volunteers of Hospice Georgian Triangle in Collingwood. I was pleased to receive notification last week that the local hospice will receive \$540,000 per year in operational funding for Campbell House, a new six-bed residential facility.

While this is good news for the Collingwood hospice, which is in the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN, Matthews House Hospice in Alliston, which is in the Central LHIN, is not receiving the same level of funding. In fact, Matthews House Hospice only receives \$37,840 per year, a fraction of the \$700,000 they spend in operational costs.

Mr. Speaker, the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN funds 21 hospice beds at \$90,000 each per year. The Central LHIN funds three, and these three beds are all the way in Richmond Hill, a 70-kilometre drive from Alliston. It's simply not fair funding.

Matthews House Hospice's new residential facility in Alliston opened its doors last August and has already been used by 42 clients. Most of these people came from hospitals, saving the province 534 bed days of acute care. Matthews House has been told by their LHIN that LHINs do not fund operational costs, and yet hospices in Barrie, Huntsville, Richmond Hill, Owen Sound and now Collingwood all receive operational funding from the province. This discrepancy in funding is wrong, and the government needs to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with this problem, to ensure that all Ontarians receive equal access to end-of-life hospice care.

NATALIE SPOONER

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'd like to rise today to recognize Natalie Spooner, a young athlete from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, who attended Cedarbrae Collegiate, whom I met this weekend at Scarborough Village community centre, with her brother Doug and parents, Peter and Ann-Marie Spooner.

Natalie has received much international recognition through her many accomplishments in the sport of hockey. She holds a silver medal from the International Ice Hockey Federation's 2008 under-18 Women's World Championship; a silver medal from the 2011 IIHF World Women's Championship; a gold medal from the 2012 IIHF World Women's Championship; the 2013-14 Clarkson Cup; and, most recently, Speaker, at 23, Natalie holds a gold medal in women's ice hockey from the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. For someone so young, these are incredible feats.

Natalie pursued hockey after her brothers started playing. In fact, she played on the boys' team with her brothers.

As a young woman, she has pursued a non-traditional career path. She remains an inspiration and a role model to the young girls and young women of this province and this country, including the young girls and young women of my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

Natalie is already using her celebrity status and was amongst the first to sign up as a volunteer for the Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games volunteer program kickoff yesterday. What a great young woman and an incredible inspiration to all of us.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, the driving conditions Ontarians have had to deal with on the provincial highways this past winter have, quite frankly, been disgraceful. I have had constituents contact me after nearly every snowfall to complain that they have never seen our provincial highways in such terrible shape.

Municipalities such as West Nipissing, Chisholm and Armour passed resolutions that resolve, "That the Premier of Ontario take the necessary steps to immediately restore the level of service for winter maintenance on provincial highways."

They also want the Ministry of Transportation to undertake the evaluation and potential reclassification of all provincial highways to ensure adequate road maintenance and to ensure that contractors consistently maintain provincial highways to the standard that ensures continued public safety.

Thanks to a motion from my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, our caucus was successful in getting the Auditor General to investigate the reasons motorists in every corner of Ontario had to take their lives into their hands when they got behind the wheel on provincial highways this past winter. Ontarians deserve to have this situation fixed to ensure their families' safety on our roads.

For the third year, I say this cannot happen again next winter.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EQUAL PAY DAY

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I will tell you that today I am sharing my time with the minister responsible for women's issues, the Honourable Teresa Piruzza.

It is an honour to rise today in the Legislature to recognize April 16 as Equal Pay Day with community groups from across Ontario.

I'd like to also introduce some of the guests in the gallery who have joined us on this auspicious occasion: Mary Cornish is with us, who is the chair of the Equal

Pay Coalition; Emanuela Heyninck, the Pay Equity Commissioner; Gracie Lin and Joanna McDonald from the Pay Equity Commission; Heather McGregor is with us, executive director of the YWCA of Toronto; Nancy Hutchison is with us, secretary treasurer for the Ontario Federation of Labour; and Cathy Carroll is also here, from Service Employees International Union, Local 1. Speaker, please welcome them to Queen's Park.

I want to acknowledge the advocates, the community leaders and those who are working to end wage discrimination every day, and that includes the leadership of Emanuela Heyninck, Ontario's Pay Equity Officer, and the Pay Equity Office itself.

We recognize the critical role that women play in our economy, while reflecting on the sombre reality that women earn less on average than men. We must recommit ourselves to ending this discrimination and celebrating the amazing contributions that women make to our economy, while ensuring that the contributions of our daughters and our granddaughters are fully valued and recognized.

By acknowledging this day, Ontario joins others around the world in recognizing that while we've made significant progress, this inequality still exists and we have much more work to do.

Women make up a central part of the workforce, the majority of post-secondary graduates, and a growing number of leaders in our economy and our society. Ontario's women are innovators, they're scientists, they're teachers, they're CEOs, and I'm incredibly proud to say today, they're the Premier of Ontario.

However, on average, women still do not make the same income as men, and this gap increases among racialized women and also those women who are living with a disability.

As long as there is a wage gap, Ontario's economic engine is failing to fire on all cylinders. That's why we've asked the province's Pay Equity Commission to host a round table to discuss ways to address this gender wage gap in Ontario specifically.

1520

It was our government, under Premier Peterson, that passed the Pay Equity Act. Today it is still recognized as one of the most progressive pay equity statutes in the entire world.

In 2012, Speaker, we provided nearly \$1.5 million in funding to support women in the skilled trades. We've also launched the Second Career program and helped more than 38,000 women retrain for a new career.

We recognize that 58% of minimum wage earners are women. Our government is increasing the minimum wage to \$11 an hour on June 1. And we've introduced legislation that would, if passed, tie future annual minimum wage increases to Ontario's consumer price index. This makes it easier for women and for all workers to put food on a table, a roof over their head and to help their own kids get ahead. This will put more money in the pockets of hard-working women and their families, Speaker.

The truth is, though, that Equal Pay Day is a day that simply shouldn't exist. Recognizing the value of work that women do contributes to a more equal, just and prosperous society. So I call on all Ontarians to recommit themselves to closing the gender wage gap so we can achieve fairness in pay.

I now ask the Honourable Teresa Piruzza, minister responsible for women's issues, to continue with her words on this very important issue.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I rise to join my colleague the Minister of Labour in recognizing April 16 as Equal Pay Day. I, too, would like to welcome our guests here today. Welcome. Thank you for being here.

I share the minister's and our government's belief in the importance of this day. It's particularly important to the women of Ontario. Today, half of Ontario's workforce are women and more than half of our post-secondary graduates are female. Professionally, women have broken through in every field. Almost 50% of Canada's small and medium-sized businesses are owned or partially owned by women. Across Canada, women-owned small businesses generate a massive \$18 billion annually and provide 1.7 million jobs.

Yet, for all our successes, there are challenges. The fact that the gender wage gap exists means that women's economic potential is not fully utilized. Shortchanging women in the labour market means shortchanging Ontario's families.

We know that helping women achieve gender equality is vital to Ontario's economic prosperity. We also understand the challenges some women face in the labour market.

My colleague Minister Flynn mentioned the important steps by the Ministry of Labour to increase the minimum wage and strengthen workplace rights for vulnerable workers. I'm very encouraged by these measures because we know that they will particularly benefit women.

Our government is also investing significantly in child care and full-day kindergarten. These investments help women return to the workforce or take training to upgrade their skills, knowing their children are well cared for.

Through the Ontario Women's Directorate, we're also investing in training programs for women, to help them secure better-paying jobs in the skilled trades and the information technology sector.

We also continue to support the advancement of women in business and in senior leadership positions. We know that today women account for just 15.9% of board members in the Financial Post 500 companies.

This past summer, our government asked the Ontario Securities Commission to undertake a review and public consultation on a "comply or explain" approach to corporate governance. We did this because there remains a stigma in the corporate world that we must work hard to change. We've seen that when other countries have adopted a "comply or explain" approach, there has been an increase in female corporate leadership.

As a government, and as female role models, we must continue to work hard to break down all these barriers for

the women of today and the leaders of tomorrow. So let's join together to recognize Equal Pay Day to promote the equality of women. We must close the gender gap for all Ontario women, whether ensuring a decent wage for front-line service providers, breaking the corporate glass ceiling for senior business leaders, or overcoming an equality barrier faced by women in the skilled trades, because we all know it's good for our economy and it's the right thing to do. Strong women mean a strong Ontario.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I, too, am pleased to rise today to speak about Equal Pay Day. I'll share my time with the PC MPP from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

It is important to reflect on the progress that is being made in this province and all across the country. It was back in 1987 that this province introduced the Ontario Pay Equity Act as the first important step in recognizing the equal value of women's work and eliminating discrimination in the workforce. This legislation requires employers to take steps to ensure that both women and men are paid on the same basis. The result is that Ontario's wage gap has narrowed significantly since the Ontario government first passed legislation to establish the proactive pay equity law. Through the combined efforts of the general public, businesses and government, more awareness is created about the causes of the wage gap and more concrete steps are taken to better address and ultimately close it.

Our PC caucus has strongly advocated for a government that helps create a fair, productive and sustainable society for all. We are proud to support the very capable and intelligent women in our society. Look around, Speaker, and we see many of them in our caucus and in this Legislature today and in workplaces all across our great province.

However, in government and across the public sector, the focus should be on people being paid based on performance, and though we have made some progress, there is still work to be done. Speaker, those who can deliver outstanding work should be rewarded through an efficiently managed system of performance pay. Having clearly established goals and delivering on them to make Ontario stronger and better should be our top priority.

On behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus, I'm committed to continue standing up for hard-working individuals in Ontario and committed to working toward a society of equal pay for equal work and continuing to break down barriers for women.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today as the PC critic for women to speak about Equal Pay Day.

Before I talk about equal pay, I want to commend the former PC Minister of Labour, the Honourable Charles Daley, who introduced Bill 120, Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, back in 1951. I didn't expect anyone to know his name here. This bill stated that "no employer and no person acting on his behalf shall discriminate between his male and female employees by paying a female employee at a rate of pay less than the rate of pay

paid to a male employee employed by him for the same work done in the same establishment." I know those words seem awkward in this day and age, but the bill received royal assent on April 5, 1951.

Although pay equity is the law in Ontario, women, on average, still earn 31% less than men. This pay gap affects women of all ages and education levels, and has an even greater effect on racialized women, women with disabilities and aboriginal women.

Social service providers such as child care, child welfare, development services and community agency staff who work in predominantly female-dominated jobs are directly affected by pay inequality in Ontario. They want the Ontario Premier to take action in closing the pay gap between women and men.

Several agencies—and I know we've all met with them in our communities—have noted that the proxy pay equity obligations are a heavy financial burden and are creating a wage gap between agencies offering the same services within the sector. In 2009, this government stopped paying these agencies the base funding that they needed to match the increases that they are obligated to pay under the pay equity plan. These agencies still have an outstanding liability across the industry, and they are either going to end up in deficit if they don't pay it and are accruing liability that will cripple them—I would name Community Living and Horizons groups, just to name a few.

1530

So they're facing significant issues that are going to jeopardize the care as well as employment in that sector. I wanted to highlight that today, because these workers provide care for the most vulnerable in our society. So if the government would like to look at that and take action, I hope there's a promise over there, because this issue, in 2014 especially, is going to have to be addressed.

There are many statistics out there of women receiving less pay. I know that the women in my riding are valued members of the workforce, and this should be reflected in equal pay for them. Strong women; strong society; strong families; strong province of Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First of all, I want to thank the government for bringing into play a motion that I tabled last year and was tabled on behalf, of course, of the entire New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath. Not giving credit to a woman on Equal Pay Day is kind of apropos, I think, because this is the day that we're acknowledging that women should get credit for the work that they do. So, hey, no hard feelings.

Shockingly, I want to point out, however, that it's getting worse. The problem is getting worse. It used to be, last year, that women made about \$0.72 for every \$1 a man made for work of equal value; now it's about \$0.69. The problem is getting worse under this government's watch. I think that is point number one. It is a critical point. You heard the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock speak about the pay equity issue that this government itself is in breach of. So the very first thing that one would ask of the honourable ministers over there is that they honour their own sentiments.

When it comes to Community Living—and I'm going to give an example. Community Living Guelph Wellington received an order from the Pay Equity Commission which states that they must make pay equity adjustments to employees' wage rates back to April 1, 2010. As the other member noted, this is not for them alone. This is a problem across the field. The only place they get their money is from this government. They cannot pay out what they do not get in. They are a government agency and, as such, the responsibility of this government. In fact, in the Select Committee on Developmental Disabilities, they were looking at recommendations. I'm sure one of the recommendations will be to uphold their own law. So that's critical.

What is Equal Pay Day? Really what it is: It illustrates how far into the next year a woman must work to earn the same amount a man made in the previous year. That's the point. That's why the date is ever-shifting. In my motion, it said April 9, which it was last year. Guess what? The situation is much worse. It's now April 16.

I'm pleased, as I say again, that the government has acted on my motion. I'm delighted. It would have been nice to have been given credit, and to the New Democratic Party, for the work that we did and also for the work, of course, that the Equal Pay Coalition has done, because really it's them that had brought this forward, that had brought it to our attention, and that work every day on this issue. It would be nice to pay them well, too, to give them a little bit more money to their work, because it is very difficult to do their work when they're not funded properly either.

Again, my advice to my friends across the aisle is this: acknowledge when a woman does something good; acknowledge women's work—in this case, my own. That would be nice. That's number one. Number two: Do something about your own breach of the pay equity legislation. Actually pay women the rate that they're entitled to across the Community Living sector, among others, but particularly where an order has come from the Pay Equity Commission. At least uphold your own law. So I would suggest that.

Then, of course, when we look broader across the industry—yes, it's good to study the issue; yes, it's good to actually be proactive about it, but again, it's not looking good after 11 years that the situation is getting worse under your watch. We've seen that things from last year to this year are progressing in a negative direction. Let's hope, finally, that from this year to next year, the date that we celebrate Pay Equity Day or Equal Pay Day is maybe January 1. Wouldn't that be nice? It would be nice. That's my advice.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Petitions. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much. Very acute observation there, Speaker. Appreciate it very much. You got us all on our toes here.

Interjection: He doesn't even have one.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, I have thousands of them.

A petition from the riding of Durham that reads as follows:

“Whereas current OHIP legislation and policies prevent Ontario post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 64 from receiving additional one-on-one OHIP-funded physiotherapy; and

“Whereas these post-stroke patients deserve to be rehabilitated to their greatest ability possible to maybe return to work and become provincial income taxpayers again and productive citizens;

“Whereas current OHIP policies prevent Ontarians under age 65 and over the age of 20 from receiving additional OHIP-funded physiotherapy and rehabilitation after their initial stroke treatment; and

“Whereas these OHIP policies are discriminatory in nature, forcing university/college students and other Ontarians to wait until age 65 to receive more OHIP-funded physiotherapy;

“Whereas the lack of post-stroke physiotherapy offered to Ontarians between the ages of 20 and 64 is forcing these people to prematurely cash in their RRSPs and/or sell their houses to raise funds” to pay for treatment;

“Now therefore we, the undersigned, hereby respectfully petition the Ontario Legislature to introduce and pass amending legislation and new regulations to provide OHIP-funded post-stroke physiotherapy and treatment for all qualified post-stroke patients, thereby eliminating the discriminatory nature of current treatment practices.”

I am pleased to present this to Kathryn, one of the pages, and sign it to support it.

TAXATION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the cost of living in northwestern Ontario is significantly higher than other regions of the province due to the high cost of necessities such as hydro, home heating fuel, gasoline and auto insurance; and

“Whereas an increase in the price of any of these essential goods will make it even more difficult for people living in northwestern Ontario to pay their bills and put food on the table;

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

“To reject any proposed increase to the harmonized sales tax, gas tax or any other fees or taxes in the northwest; and instead investigate other means such as increasing corporate tax compliance or eliminating corporate tax loopholes in order to fund transit in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.”

I support this and will affix my signature and give it to page Isabella to deliver to the table.

TIRE DISPOSAL

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

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship’s eco fees for agricultural, mining or forestry equipment tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24; and

“Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco fees that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces; and

“Whereas other provincial governments either exempt some of these tires from recycling programs or charge fees only up to \$75; and

“Whereas these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers, mining and forestry companies and lost sales for equipment dealerships; and

“Whereas the PC caucus has proposed a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, do hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship’s fees on agricultural, mining and forestry off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs.”

I sign my name to this, approve of it and give it to page Divya.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas resident levels in long-term-care facilities are rising every year, with corresponding pressures on health care demands;

“Whereas aggressive behaviour and mental health issues are on the rise and represent a significant risk to staff and residents alike;

“Whereas facilities are not currently capable of dealing with the increasing number of extremely aggressive residents;

“Whereas not enough research exists with respect to aggressive behaviour risk assessment and management;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly take into consideration the considered recommendations of groups such as the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, and allocate adequate funding and resources to long-term care for seniors.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’m going to sign this and I’m going to give it to Caroline to deliver to the desk.

1540

TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Stop the Gas Tax Increase.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government is considering a 10-cents-per-litre increase on the provincial gas tax to fund mass transit; and

“Whereas the government’s alternative is to raise the gas tax five cents per litre and increase the harmonized sales tax by 0.5%; and

“Whereas many people in rural Ontario need to drive to get to and from work or school or to get groceries and other essentials and do not have the option of taking mass transit; and

“Whereas a 10-cents-per-litre increase of the gas tax places an unaffordable financial burden on many families; and

“Whereas the increase in the gas tax would cost the average Ontario household \$260 a year; and

“Whereas the government should cut waste to fund mass transit before taxing Ontarians;

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

“That the government of Ontario reduce waste and fund mass transit through methods that do not place an unnecessary financial burden on the people of Ontario, especially those who must drive to and from work or school.”

It’s signed by hundreds of people across my riding. I affix my signature to it.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes to me from Mrs. Rainville from Herman Mayer Drive in Lively, as well as from Mr. and Mrs. Williams from Alban. It reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas-price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas-price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Callista to bring it to the Clerk.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim Wilson: Ontario College of Trades

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

“Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

“Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

“Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

“To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers.”

I certainly agree with this petition and I will sign it.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and” all “mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective”—and cruel, I would add—“approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

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

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and” all dog types.

On behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been killed just because of the way they looked, I’m signing this and giving it to Eli to deliver.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘mostly consisting of the difference between the market price and the price paid to generators as set by the board for OPG or under contract with the government or the OPA’; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has been rising steadily over the last few years and is expected to continue to rise from \$700 million (prior to the 2009 passage of the Green Energy Act) to \$8.1 billion by 2014; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s 2010 fall economic statement stated that hydro bills are expected to rise 46% by 2015, and that new renewable power generation would account for 56% of that increase; and

“Whereas small to mid-sized businesses across Ontario are seeing the global adjustment portion of their monthly hydro bills increase significantly to the point

that it is now larger than the actual energy portion of their bills; and

“Whereas many of those businesses are now delaying investment or hiring, or both, and considering either closing or moving outside of the province of Ontario as a result of delivered-to-market industrial energy rates that are now the highest in North America;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on its expensive energy policy by cancelling the feed-in tariff (FIT) subsidies and treating Ontario’s energy as an economic development tool so that it once again is a competitive advantage for Ontario in retaining and attracting jobs and investment.”

I wholeheartedly agree with his, will sign it, and send it to the table with page Isabella.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from people all over northeastern Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government has made ... (PET) scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my name, and ask page Megan to bring it to the Clerk.

MINIMUM WAGE

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

“Whereas the Ontario government has raised minimum wage by 50% since 2003 and will increase it to \$11, the highest provincial minimum wage in Canada, on June 1;

“Whereas both families and businesses in Ontario deserve a fair and predictable approach to setting the minimum wage;

“Whereas indexing minimum wage to CPI is supported by business, labour and anti-poverty groups from across Ontario as the best way to achieve that;

“Whereas indexing ensures minimum wage keeps pace with the cost of living, providing fairness for workers and their families and predictability for businesses to plan and stay competitive;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 165, Fair Minimum Wage Act, 2014.”

I fully support the petition, Madam Speaker, and I will give my petition to page Nick.

PENSION PLAN

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents.

“Whereas General Motors has contributed significantly to the Ontario and local economies and was a significant contributor to the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund (PBGF); and

“Whereas the General Motors of Canada salaried pension plan fund (plan 0340950) is severely underfunded due to the government’s lack of responsibility in allowing policies (regulation 5.1 ‘too-big-to-fail’ legislation) which permitted GM to underfund the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund; and

“Whereas GM is experiencing severe financial problems and there is a potential for bankruptcy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the GenMo Salaried Pension Organization in petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour its commitment to totally fund the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund; and

“That in any approved restructuring plan of General Motors of Canada, provision be made to ensure GM fully funds pension plan 0340950; and continues to provide lifetime benefits to retirees and surviving spouses in accordance with its retirement commitments; and

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario take immediate action to protect the pensions of GM retirees.”

I’m pleased to sign this petition and present it to Justin.

FIREFIGHTERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from firefighters all over Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas firefighters are routinely exposed to burning chemicals and other toxins in the course of protecting the lives and property of fellow citizens; and

“Whereas even with the best respiratory practices and protective equipment, exposures will continue to occur due to absorption through the skin once a firefighter has become soaked during fire suppression activities; and

“Whereas epidemiological, medical and scientific studies conclusively demonstrate an increased rate of diseases such as cancer in firefighters versus the general population;”

1550

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Amend the regulations of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act ... to include cancer of the lungs, breasts, testicles, prostate, skin and multiple myeloma in presumptive legislation for occupational diseases related to firefighting.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Nusaybah to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FIGHTING FRAUD AND REDUCING AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE RATES ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 DE LUTTE CONTRE LA FRAUDE ET DE RÉDUCTION DES TAUX D’ASSURANCE-AUTOMOBILE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 25, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act respecting insurance system reforms and repair and storage liens / Projet de loi 171, Loi concernant les réformes du système d’assurance et le privilège des réparateurs et des entrepreneurs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: As was pointed out, the last time we debated Bill 171, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, was March 25. I’m just going to sort of carry on from that—almost finished.

Although, before I do, I want to talk about how many government bills are currently up and awaiting debate, because I think it calls into question the priorities—if there are any—of the Liberal government.

Right now, today, we have 28 active government bills sitting on the docket, all of which can be called, as we all know, by the government House leader at any given point. The fact that we’ve got 28 of them—my dad used to say, “If you have too many priorities, you don’t have any priorities.” I do question whether we need to have a little more focus, a little more direction on where this government wants to go in terms of debate on legislation that needs to be passed.

Bill 171, Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, is a fascinating piece of legislation, but is it the priority of this government? I’ll leave it at that.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: She wasn’t up. I will cede, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All right. The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That was very gracious of the minister for seniors. I appreciate that very much.

I want to just add a couple of minutes to the comment the member has made. She’s right; when you have too many priorities, you don’t have any at all. There should be some focus on where this government is going. I point to the budget, and it will be interesting, when the budget comes to the House, to find out where their priorities are for the people of Ontario, for the people of the province,

and how they're going to improve things for the people of Ontario.

We're going to be speaking about Bill 171. This bill was brought forward by the Minister of Finance with respect to addressing the issue of the high cost of insurance. We had brought that to light, that people could not afford the cost of insurance the way things were going in this province. We asked this government to look at a 15% decrease. We also see that they've sent this bill to the table, Bill 171, and it's supposed to address that fraud issue, because that was something that was very much discussed in committee. I know we're going to have debates today and I know that will come up, and how this bill is effectively working on that topic to help fraud and so, in that case, reduce auto rates. But we do have our doubts that that specific fraud piece in this bill is going to specifically address the premiums section that people pay for their auto and home insurance.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: Now I'll take my two minutes. I know the member from Dufferin-Caledon has spoken at quite some length on this particular bill and indeed it is one of the many bills that we do need to pass in the House. This is an important one and it has been talked about already for quite some time.

As we all know in the House, last year, as we recall, the House passed legislation that would bring some relief to our drivers in Ontario, and for good reason. As you know, insurance rates are what they are, but we have come a long way, and since last year we have already seen a shift in premiums, in insurance rates. We see insurance companies advertising their lower premiums already. We would be telling our consumers to check around instead of taking a blank response from their present insurance company. Rates are coming down. If the present bill, Bill 171, were to be approved, it would move closer to becoming a reality. I think this is what we all want: to bring some relief to our taxpayers.

What would the bill do? It's fighting fraud. We all know that there is a problem with that. Also, there is one problem with the storage of automobiles. They're sitting too long and therefore charging too much.

We have already spoken about this particular bill in the House many times—both sides of the House. We have the responsibility to pass every bill that, hopefully, is introduced, but this one here is one of those that I think is important. I think we should do it, and I hope that we can do it as quickly as possible.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I was here the last day that the member from Dufferin-Caledon was speaking. In her 20 minutes, she did summarize a number of the concerns that we have on this bill.

Responding here to the promised 15% rate reduction—is completely a false advertising issue, in my opinion. The issue of fraud has been dealt with in special reports. The health care and assessment issues, the

towing issues, the auto repair and fraud within that, the victims, and the whole group of people insured under the facilities provision are not thoroughly dealt with in this Bill 171. And our critic on the file, Jeff Yurek from Elgin-Middlesex-London, has consulted widely and has come up with some very significant supportive amendments. All of us would like to see reform to auto insurance to be a mandatory affordable product. As such, it should go to committee and receive the proper input, just so it doesn't become another football in the arena of making political and electoral promises, really is what I see.

They promised it in response to a request, in fact, by the NDP—the coalition agreement that they had with the last budget. That's where this came from. I can tell you right now, I have very little confidence that this will actually happen. My sense is, if you look at the issues and how they're dealing with it, they're actually giving rate rebates to the bad drivers in Ontario right now. The good drivers, like myself—I actually had a slight increase, and I'm paying a high rate of insurance. So the evidence isn't there to support anything they've said.

I support the member from Dufferin-Caledon for putting her statements on the record. This bill certainly has to go to committee, and I think our finance critic and others will be commenting more thoroughly on this in just a few minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Kenora-Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. As the previous speaker just said, he has very little confidence that this bill will actually go forward, that it will be passed and that—I'll paraphrase a little bit, but he seems concerned that we'll continue to go on this little merry-go-round.

It's true that the rate of auto insurance in the province of Ontario has been a big issue over the past many years but especially over the past couple of years, as my party has prioritized seeing some significant movement for the people of this province. In Kenora-Rainy River—I'm going to speak to this a little bit later—we don't often have the luxury of public transportation, and so that means, as with many rural areas of this province, we have to rely on our vehicles to get us from point A to point B.

My concern is that this bill actually will pass. I don't want to see it pass in its current form, because in its current form the only thing that it does to help people across this province is to have a flashy title: Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates. But if you look at the content of the bill, there's actually very little in there. It doesn't seem to do anything in the way of helping individuals in this province reduce their rates, but it does seem to do a whole lot to help auto insurance companies to bring down their costs and maximize their profits.

I do welcome hearing more debate on this. I welcome seeing some substantive changes in committee, should it make it to committee, and we'll continue this discussion a little later on this afternoon.

1600

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: To the member from London–Fanshawe, the minister responsible for seniors, the members from Durham and Kenora–Rainy River, thank you for your comments.

Bill 171 is an issue. However—there’s always a “however,” Speaker—I was at a home show all weekend—Friday night, Saturday and Sunday—manning my booth. And you know what is truly an issue for the residents in Dufferin–Caledon? Do you know what, without almost any exceptions, people were talking about?

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Not during the two-minute—

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, we don’t have a quorum, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I’m going to ask the Clerk to check.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin–Caledon, you have a few moments to wrap up.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. As I was saying, certainly auto insurance is a concern for the people in Dufferin–Caledon, but almost without exception, what people were raising with me during the home show—operated by the Lions Club—was energy costs. We’ve gone through an incredible winter. Quite frankly, it didn’t matter what kind of power you were using, you were going through huge increases. Many of the questions and many of the concerns were basically, “Why is this happening? Tell me why it’s all happening with so many of them across the sectors?” Which, of course, led to some very interesting conversations about cause and effect, the Green Energy Act, subsidies for wind and solar power, and what that has actually done to energy rates in Ontario. Those, of course, were the constituents who were lucky enough to be receiving their Ontario hydro bills. There were a number of them who were asking for my assistance—believe it or not—to get a bill from Hydro One so they could pay it.

In terms of Bill 171, I would be pleased to have this referred to committee for further debate and amendments, but at some point we have to get—

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: —I’d like to point out that the member opposite wasn’t speaking to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I listened carefully to the—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes, a point of order.

Mr. Paul Miller: I’d just like to point out that the member, in my humble opinion, was addressing around the bill, and that member who complained wasn’t here. That member wasn’t even here.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

The member from London West will take the floor.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise today on behalf of my constituents in London West to speak to Bill 171, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act. From its title this bill certainly sounds like something that would be important to the people I represent, because they have been waiting a long time for a reduction in auto insurance rates. In fact, I think many of my constituents would be glad even if the bill was called “the fighting fraud and not increasing auto insurance rates act,” because at a time when people were led to believe that rates would go down, what they’ve been seeing instead are increases in rates.

Even people with no history of accidents or tickets are seeing their rates increase, with no recourse or explanation from insurance companies. One constituent, a single mother of two who has never been in an accident, saw her bill increase by 10%. She just wrote to me this month asking why big insurance companies are allowed to get away with hiking up rates by exorbitant amounts without providing any legitimate reasons for doing so.

Many other constituents in London West have contacted me to ask when the 15% reduction in auto insurance that was promised by the Liberal government will come into effect. My colleagues and I on this side of the House know that families in our communities are struggling to make ends meet, which is why we insisted that the government include a 15% rate reduction in last year’s budget. But, as I mentioned, not only are my constituents not seeing those promised rate reductions; they are seeing their rates increase. As we all know, rate increases, whether it’s auto insurance, hydro or gas, have a disproportionate impact on people with low incomes and on seniors and others with fixed incomes. In the case of auto insurance, people who drive don’t have a choice of whether or not to buy insurance. The government, quite sensibly, requires anyone who drives to be insured, which means that the government has an obligation to regulate the industry and make sure that rates are fair and that regulations reflect an appropriate balance between industry needs and protection of the rights of consumers.

The other part of the title of this bill, “Fighting Fraud,” is also something that is important to the people of London West and to all Ontarians. Fighting fraud is definitely something we can all agree on. We know that the costs of fraud end up being directly passed on to the consumer and are used to justify premium increases, so it appears from its title that Bill 171 is designed to rid the

system of fraud, which will reduce costs for insurance companies, which can then be used to lower insurance rates.

Unfortunately, the only thing this bill really does is reduce costs for insurance companies. It is another gift for huge insurance companies at the expense of auto insurance policyholders and accident victims. It will do nothing to fight fraud and nothing to reduce insurance rates.

I want to begin my remarks on Bill 171 with an overview of what the legislation includes and then move on to why this bill is problematic for my colleagues and I in the NDP caucus.

First, I want to outline the parts of the bill that my colleagues and I have very little trouble with. These aspects deal with the licensing of insurance agents and adjusters and clarification of repair and storage liens.

Adding a level of accountability for insurance agents and adjusters is completely understandable and acceptable. Our caucus has not received any complaints or concerns about this aspect of the bill. More oversight is always a good thing, especially when we are dealing with a product that the government has made mandatory for Ontarians.

In terms of the provisions of the bill dealing with repair and storage liens, we know that there were issues surrounding the towing and storage of vehicles after accidents had taken place. This bill deals with that in a non-contentious way. The bill will reduce the amount of time a vehicle can be stored and accruing charges from 60 days to a shorter time frame.

As a caucus, we have no problems with either of these aspects of the bill.

The two key parts of the bill that we find troublesome, however, have to do with dispute resolution and prejudgment interest.

In terms of dispute resolution, currently, accident victims have the right to go to court or to arbitration if they believe they have been wrongfully denied benefits by their insurance company. However, under the proposed legislation, the right to sue will be taken away entirely. Subsection 280(3) of this bill precludes the ability for someone to bring an action against their insurance company to court, which we regard as a fundamental abrogation of the rights of the people in Ontario. As one of my constituents who wrote to me about this bill said, "Bill 171 proposes to deny accident victims due process and the right to appeal in motor vehicle benefit disputes with their insurance company. Removing a person's fundamental right to sue is a breach of one's fundamental rights to justice, which clearly ought to supersede any legislative intent." This concern about access to justice for victims is shared by every member of my caucus. Denying accident victims access to the courts represents what we see as one of the most glaring deficiencies of this legislation as currently proposed.

Under Bill 171, instead of going to court, claimants who feel that they have been denied benefits must advance their claims to the Licence Appeal Tribunal in

the Ministry of the Attorney General. Instead of providing recourse to an independent judicial system that safeguards the fundamental rights of citizens, people who have been injured must take their claims to a tribunal.

1610

Reading the speeches from the members on the other side of the House, I've heard that there is a view that moving the dispute resolution process to the Licence Appeal Tribunal was a recommendation of Justice Cunningham in his comprehensive report. However, as pointed out by my colleague the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Justice Cunningham indicated only that there should be a separation between FSCO as an adjudicator and FSCO as a regulator. It's important to keep in mind that arbitrators at FSCO are already independent; not only that, they are salaried, with stable jobs and lots of experience dealing with complicated issues.

The Licence Appeal Tribunal, by comparison, deals with liquor licence violations and driving-related offences, not complex issues like liability. The tribunal may be appropriate to handle some of the disputes in the system, but tribunal members are simply less qualified and experienced than FSCO arbitrators, and moving the dispute resolution process to this venue makes little sense. It may actually harm vulnerable accident victims who are seeking redress from insurance companies.

To be clear, Justice Cunningham never suggested that the dispute resolution process be moved to the Licence Appeal Tribunal. As a caucus, New Democrats have significant concerns about the impact this will have on Ontarians.

Further, as a researcher who believes that policy should be based on evidence, I want to draw MPPs' attention to the fact that there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that moving the dispute resolution process in FSCO to the Licence Appeal Tribunal will contribute to reducing costs. In fact, it is even possible that moving the process to the Licence Appeal Tribunal may actually add costs to the system and be to the financial detriment of the province.

What is clear is that these changes, removing access to the courts and replacing independent judicial review with a tribunal, do not have anything to do with fighting fraud. They are mostly about making it easier for insurance companies to wrongfully deny benefits and delay settlements and will make it harder for injured Ontarians to collect what they are rightfully owed. The changes add further complexity and costs to an already complex and costly process. Previously, if an accident victim was denied benefits and was injured because of someone else's fault, they could seek redress from the court system on both counts. Now an accident victim who wants to dispute benefits will have to take his or her case to the new arbitration system while also pursuing their legal suit in court. They will have to pay a lawyer to bring in two entirely different cases in two entirely different systems, one in the courts against the person responsible and one in the arbitration system against the insurance company that wrongfully denied benefits.

Moving beyond this, a significant disadvantage of this proposed system is that if the accident victim is successful in proving that the insurance company should have paid the claimed benefits, the insurance company only has to pay a tiny fraction of the legal costs, unlike in the court system. In effect, this bill places the financial burden of extra legal costs on the victim, who is already in a vulnerable situation. We know that our complex auto insurance system makes it extremely difficult for people to access the benefits that they are reasonably entitled to, and this proposed change will only exacerbate this issue. It may lead people to just give up because they cannot afford the fight. It is hard to understand how this serves to protect the interests of Ontarians, especially the most vulnerable members of our population.

The other flaw in this legislation is the provision that deals with prejudgment interest. Bill 171 will change a 30-year-old rule that has been very important to people who have suffered injuries in Ontario. Prejudgment interest on pain and suffering is and always was intended to compensate an innocent victim when the negligent person's insurance company delays paying damages. Simply put, it ensures timely payment to victims for pain and suffering damages by insurance companies.

As we know, current legislation says that insurance companies are required to pay 5% interest on whatever is owed for pain and suffering. For example, if a person has a serious injury and is owed \$50,000 for pain and suffering and the insurance company delays payment for three years, the insurance company will pay about \$7,500 in interest. The reason the interest rate is set at 5% is to encourage insurance companies to settle quickly and not to drag their heels and delay the issue over many years.

The interest rate serves to protect the injured party from long delays in collecting what they are entitled to. Bill 171 changes this policy, a policy that protects the interests of the people of this province. It makes it easier for insurance companies to increase their profits by lowering the interest rate to 1.3% and allowing it to be modified quarterly. This provides a further disincentive for insurance companies to settle claims. Instead of paying out settlements to avoid a 5% interest penalty, insurers can hold on to this money and invest it at a profit, knowing that they will only have to pay the low rate of a 1.3% penalty when they finally settle.

How this policy will serve to protect the interests of everyday Ontarians is not at all clear. We already know that insurance companies can make money by delaying the claim process. This new legislation will mean that they can benefit even further on the backs of victims. Again, it is hard to understand how this has anything to do with either fighting fraud or reducing auto insurance rates, because all of the evidence suggests that this change is nothing more than another gift to Ontario's already profitable insurance sector.

As I've been explaining, this legislation, as it is currently proposed, will do more harm than good for the people of my community in London as well as across the province. This is what happens when legislation is rushed

through. Within just two weeks of the release of Justice Cunningham's report, Bill 171 suddenly appeared in this House as a way to address some of the issues presented in the report. The government's rush to introduce legislation means that there was no consultation with the public. Perhaps more concerning, there was no consultation with experts in the field. I think that we would all agree that the best and most effective policies are evidence-based. It's clear that this legislation lacks proof or evidence that the steps taken in this bill will reduce costs.

On this point, quoting from correspondence with another one of my constituents in London West, "the current amendments were not introduced with consultation or consideration of the accident victims in Ontario." Again, I think the problems that my colleagues and I in the NDP caucus who have spoken to this bill—these concerns about Bill 171 arise because of the lack of consultation or evidence upon which this proposed legislation is based.

I would also like to highlight the fact that the legislated 15% reduction in auto insurance premiums—or maybe I should say expected reduction, because we have seen little action on this promise. These rate reductions have led to auto insurance companies raising concerns about the impact of the reductions on their profits. This bill may simply reflect the industry's push to protect their profits and in fact get some of their profits back. The bill is mostly about cost containment.

I think we need to put some of the responsibility for cutting of costs on the auto insurance companies and not just on the people of Ontario. The changes that were made in 2010, which essentially capped the amount of money that insurance companies had to pay out, represented a huge \$2-billion windfall for insurers. At the time, the government said that this would lead to a reduction in rates, but we haven't seen that. Not only have these cost savings not been passed on to consumers, but it seems that the insurance companies are not doing their part to cut fat and increase efficiency in the system. We should be looking at insurance companies to lead the way in cutting costs, instead of exacerbating an already negative situation for innocent victims in Ontario. This proposed legislation does nothing to address the lack of efficiencies in the system, and I think that that's something we need to carefully consider in the future.

1620

In conclusion, I welcome further explanation from the government on how this legislation actually has anything to do with fighting fraud or reducing auto insurance rates, because it's not at all clear that this bill will do either of those things. As I've stated earlier, the many constituents who have been contacting my office to express concerns about Bill 171, about increasing auto insurance rates and about the lack of follow-through on the part of government to implement the 15% reduction promised in the last budget, do not believe that this legislation is requesting to address their concerns.

Vulnerable members of our community will be hit the hardest by the provisions of this bill. It will take away a

person's right to due process and access to legal redress, which is a significant concern for our caucus. Beyond the lack of evidence that moving the dispute resolution process to the Licence Appeal Tribunal will reduce costs in the system, I want to make sure that all members here understand the negative impact that lowering the interest rate will have on pain and suffering for the people of this province. The proposed legislation will in fact incentivize insurance companies to delay settling claims and make it easier for insurers to make a profit by delaying victims their rightfully owed settlements.

For my constituents in London West, this bill offers little relief to the high costs of auto insurance, which is what New Democrats will continue to push for.

I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate and look forward to hearing the comments of other members on Bill 171.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to stand and debate Bill 171, Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act. Automobile insurance fraud is an issue that I have been aware of for some time. I regularly hear from my constituents that they are sick and tired of the fraud within the auto insurance industry. Auto fraud is the most dreadful beast that must be tackled first and foremost. This is what the bill is addressing. This bill would improve consumer protection, reduce cost and uncertainty, and strengthen Ontario's auto insurance system.

I heard from the member the Kenora–Rainy River and the member from London West. They said that this bill would not address the issue of fraud, and the member from Kenora–Rainy River said that it has a flashy title, nothing more than that. The record of the respective governments tells the whole story. It is our government that has kept the auto insurance rates below the inflation rate. When the PCs were in power, the rates went up 45%, and when the NDP were in power, rates went up 27%. The NDP ran on the platform that they would make it a public asset, but they failed to deliver it. But this bill will definitely address the issue of fraud. If this bill is passed, this would further reduce cost, fight fraud and protect consumers.

The members from Durham and Dufferin–Caledon said that this should go to committee as soon as possible—and I echo their comments—so that we can hear the public and we can hear the—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this bill once again.

You have to look at what has happened throughout some of the history in this whole auto insurance sector, especially in the last couple of years. State Farm, who once held 11% of the insurance sector in Canada, has gone from Canada. There is no State Farm. Those TV commercials that we see for State Farm every day and every night: You can't get it here. They left. In the reason

they left Canada, they cited the Ontario auto insurance market as their reason why they've left Ontario. You also watch TV and you see Flo from Progressive. Speaker, you need to know that there is no Flo here either; you can't have that insurance here in Ontario. This file has been unbelievably mismanaged over the last 10 years.

This whole bill that they're talking about: We're eager to get it into committee so we can fix this. It has unintended consequences. Insurers today—those few that have actually stayed in Ontario—are ridding their books of even the most moderate-risk drivers. They're just cleaning house and sticking with those drivers so they can try to move on in Ontario.

This bill does nothing more than allow the Liberals to continue to scramble and try to keep the promise that they made to the NDP when they bargained for their support during the last budget.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to contribute to this debate after hearing the comments, or the contributions, that were made by the member from London West.

I have also received, as we all have, phone calls about insurance premiums. Those are one of the biggest costs, sometimes, in a household, depending on how many vehicles you have and how many drivers you have. People just can't afford those kinds of increases that have been happening time and time again.

When we presented the fact that this government—in 2010, the insurance companies changed the coverage under accident benefits and reduced those coverages, and you can see that that action resulted in insurance companies having \$2 billion in profits. So it does make sense that consumers, who pay these insurance premiums, should see the benefit of that change. That was what we had talked about here in the Legislature, but the proposal that this government has decided to address that current issue with, with regard to people affording to pay their insurance rates, is Bill 171.

Their answer to it is, "Fraud is the bogeyman in the insurance industry that's causing all these rates." Fraud is certainly a part of why rates increase, but this bill doesn't address the whole situation. Making accident victims that are injured go through a two-tier legal system does not help the victims; it only helps the insurance companies to continue to make more profit. When are we going to see that relief in premiums? From this bill? I don't think it's going to happen through that.

I'm really interested, when it does go to committee, to listen to some of the suggestions about how improve this bill. I think that having the two-tier system disadvantages accident victims from actually exercising their right to make sure they do get payments for their injuries.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be a part of the discussion today on Bill 171.

I just heard very distinctly from the member from London West—her comments about the rush to bring the

bill to the Legislature and the lack of consultation. Let me put this on record: Those of us who have sat on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs have travelled across the province—let's go on record as it is—to talk about auto insurance and auto insurance fraud. Numerous witnesses came before the committee across Ontario—not just here at the Legislature; across Ontario—to talk about fraud and auto insurance fraud. Madam Speaker, to say that it was rushed to bring the bill before the House is not correct. I want that to be on record.

1630

I listened intently to what the member said about some of the comments, that the third party does support—and I listened attentively. This second reading debate is very informative. I welcome those comments so that we can improve the bill when we go back to the committee for further enhancement of the bill. But to say the bill was brought to this House in such a rush is not accurate.

I also listened attentively to my colleague the member from Mississauga–Brampton South, who has spoken passionately to this issue for a number of years that I've been here as a member. The member from the third party, from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, also expressed concern about fraud.

Let's go on record. Let's hear the debate. I fully agree. Some conversation—

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the members from Mississauga–Brampton South, Nipissing, London–Fanshawe and Scarborough–Agincourt for their comments. There were several interesting things that were said during those comments. In particular, the member from Mississauga–Brampton South said that her constituents are sick and tired of fraud in the auto insurance industry. I think this strikes a chord with a lot of Ontarians. A lot of Ontarians agree that we need to do something to get rid of fraud.

The problem is, Bill 171 is not the solution. There is nothing in Bill 171 that appropriately addresses the fraud that exists within the system. Instead, as my colleague the member from London–Fanshawe pointed out, it creates a cumbersome process for dispute resolution that requires victims to go through the court and a tribunal. It disadvantages accident victims from exercising their rights within our legal system.

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt disputed the fact that there was a lack of consultation, but there was no consultation with accident victims about how the provisions in Bill 171 would affect them, their access to justice and their ability to pursue their rights through the system and ensure that they are able to collect the benefits for which they are intended.

I also appreciate the member from Nipissing, who talked about the unintended consequences of the bill, which is what our caucus has been emphasizing: that the bill shuts out legal recourse for victims of accidents.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Although a lot has been said on this bill, we would still like the debate to continue.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my honour and privilege to in fact rise today to debate Bill 171, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, this bill that I will be supporting, and I suspect many of my colleagues will be supporting as well.

Reducing automobile insurance rates is something that the Ontario PC Party takes very seriously. Our critic, the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London, has had laser-like focus on auto insurance reform over the past few years and has done a terrific job putting forward solid ideas that would improve auto insurance here in Ontario.

This all comes back to the promise made last year by Wynne's Liberal policy development team, the NDP. They promised to cut auto insurance rates by 15%. That was the plan and it sounded nice. You could fit the policy on a bumper sticker or, to update that analogy, you could even tweet their whole plan on auto insurance reform. There's something else out there: "Call so and so; 15 minutes will save you 15%." Well, as we all know, the NDP dutifully propped up the government that we have before us today, the same ones that stand up and criticize with a straight face each and every day in the House—and auto insurance rates all across Ontario were immediately cut by 15%.

Auto insurance rates did not decrease by 15% across the province. In a lot of places and for a lot of drivers, they didn't decrease at all. In many cases, in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, rates quickly increased. Last summer, my constituency offices in Chatham and Leamington received numerous calls from irate drivers who could not believe that their insurance rates were actually increasing. Some of them even remarked that they felt like they had been misled by the government and the NDP on this issue.

This is what happens when you oversimplify a problem and over-promise on its solution. People get frustrated and lose faith in their political institutions. This is, in fact, the problem with the bumper-sticker policy approach of the third party. Auto insurance is an incredibly complex file, and meaningful changes will have to be carefully thought out, not oversimplified in a position that could fit into a tweet. There was no plan, only a wish to cut auto insurance rates by 15%, as if by magic.

Thankfully, Bill 171 contains some meaningful auto insurance reform that will hopefully benefit all Ontarians. In the past, I have met with various auto insurance stakeholders to discuss the many ways that we can begin to tackle the problem of soaring premiums. Cracking down

on fraud is something that is brought up by almost every single group, and it's something that we need to take action on now. In fact, the bus stop just outside, at College and University, had an ad up from the Insurance Bureau of Canada that says, "Stop auto insurance fraud." We're reminded of that all the time.

I'm glad that the government is taking some meaningful first steps to tackle this key element of auto insurance reform. I'm hopeful that it can undo some of the damage that was caused by the reckless and irresponsible approach to auto insurance reform that we saw last year.

Two worrisome trends that we in the Ontario PC Party keep a close eye on are the decrease in the availability of insurance and the fact that bad drivers have so far gotten the biggest reductions in their premiums. Last year, State Farm Canada sold its entire property and casualty business in Canada to Desjardins Group. Moody's Investors Service noted that 65% of State Farm Canada's business is concentrated in the Ontario auto insurance market, which it described as "a competitive and higher-risk market."

Speaker, we all know what their motto was: "Like a good neighbour, State Farm is" here—well, was here. It's worrisome that such a large company would decide to pack up and leave this province.

The following quote from a Globe and Mail article written last July predicted this potential negative consequence: "Without the right cost reduction measures, the decrease in premiums would be a challenge for insurers to implement, and could curtail the availability of coverage in the province."

And now we are starting to see examples of the fallout in many of our ridings. We are starting to hear from numerous constituents, in a variety of ridings, that drivers with a few blemishes on their record are being dropped by their insurance carriers. These carriers are refusing to renew their policy when the current policy expires. That's tragic, Speaker.

In New Jersey, they encountered some similar issues when the state made a promise to cut rates by 15% back in 1998. Many companies left the state at that time, which made it difficult for New Jersey drivers to get insurance. While the rates did come down by 15% over two years, the lack of available insurance led to a 27% spike in premiums in 2000, just two years later.

1640

That's not what we want to see here in our province. We have started to see some of the warning signs of a similar trend. By taking the necessary steps now, we can hopefully avoid a spike in the rates a couple of years down the line. We need to ensure that all Ontarians are able to have accessible and affordable auto insurance.

The second negative consequence of the unilateral cuts to insurance rates without the corresponding cost savings is that bad drivers are getting the biggest discounts on their premiums. In the most recent filings in January, we saw that the biggest winners were those drivers insured by non-standard insurers. These are companies that insure the worst drivers, including those with

multiple accidents and drinking-and-driving convictions. Most insurance companies avoid these clients, but certain insurers fill that niche. These non-standard companies and their corresponding rate reductions are as follows: Perth Insurance, 15%; Pafco Insurance, 14.5%; and finally, Echelon General Insurers, 8.7%. We don't need to see good drivers pay the price so bad drivers can get a big break on their auto insurance. I'm sure that no member in this House wants this to be the case. Unfortunately, this is what we're seeing today, thanks in large part to the actions taken by the government and their farm team, the NDP, last year.

That said, Bill 171 provides us with an opportunity to debate the matter in general and to start to tackle the issue. This bill is a step in the right direction, and it will hopefully undo the damage of past policy decisions on this file.

Really and truthfully, this bill is a small step forward. There are a few significant cost savings that will be achieved in this piece of legislation, but are there enough to make this bill worthy of support? It's questionable. Overall, the bill is supported by the insurance industry and relevant stakeholders because they consider it to be a step in the right direction. There are, however, some concerns that we can hopefully sort out in committee, which I will mention later in my remarks.

One issue that the bill seeks to reform is prejudgment interest charges. "Prejudgment interest charges" refers to the interest charges on expenses incurred during the period of a dispute. Currently, the interest on pain-and-suffering amounts is simply locked in at 5%. If passed, Bill 171 would tie this interest rate to the market rate. Interest rates for out-of-pocket expenses incurred during a court proceeding are already tied to market rates, so this is simply a streamlining of practices. We, the PC Party, actually support this proposed change.

Bill 171 also acknowledges the problem of fraud and its effects on the insurance industry and the rates that drivers end up paying. It addresses fraud in a couple of ways; first, by looking at the health clinics that provide services for auto accident victims. The bill proposes issuing licences for these health care providers. This is meant to deal with the fraudulent practices of certain health clinics, mostly within the GTA, that tend to overbill insurers or bill for unperformed services—not a good idea.

The issue of health clinics was addressed in the anti-fraud task force report released in November 2012. The PC Party has, in fact, called on the government to act on recommendations in this report. To date, the Liberals have only addressed four of the 38 recommendations. This bill would implement four more, if passed. While this proposed change would help combat instances of fraudulent health practices related to auto insurance claims, we feel there may be a better approach to dealing with this issue. Implementing this particular change would require additional bureaucracy as well as inspectors. These costs would fall to the Financial Services Commission of Ontario—FSCO—which by the way is

industry-funded, meaning that any additional costs would ultimately be shouldered by—that's right, Speaker—premium payers.

The anti-fraud task force report also outlined another solution which we feel would have less negative consequences for drivers across the province. Our critic echoed the findings of this report and has called for the use of what we call designated managers, who must be regulated health professionals. Having a designated manager would be a requirement in order for clinics to bill insurers through Health Claims for Auto Insurance, or HCAI—pronounced “H-Kay”—for short. This electronic billing system could be used widely in our province. HCAI is already in place, and health clinics seeking to bill insurers already have to register with this system. We would not be reinventing the wheel; rather, we would simply have better utilization of the technology that is already in place.

HCAI is able to track invoices from health clinics, and because of this, it is able to flag abnormal billing patterns that indicate potentially fraudulent practices. The advantage of using such a method is that there would be a severe penalty for committing acts of fraud. Because they must use the electronic system to bill insurers, fraudulent clinics could be cut off of it.

Finally, having a regulated health professional responsible for the billing practices of each clinic creates a disincentive for committing acts of fraud. Someone's health professional licence could be on the line, so they would have to think long and hard about committing fraud.

Our proposed amendments would, in fact, be a very responsible use of resources that are already in place to increase accountability in the health care sector when it comes to auto claims. I personally feel that this is the right way to go, and I hope that the minister is open to these friendly amendments.

Another subject that this bill seeks to address is repair and storage liens. This part of the act requires body shops and tow truck operators to give notice of vehicles in their possession to the owners of the vehicles in a reasonable time frame. In particular, the bill covers instances where the storer has reason to believe that the vehicle they are holding was received from a person other than the owner of the vehicle. This would help to provide fair value for drivers when it comes to storage and repair costs. This can be thought of as a consumer protection amendment, and it is one that we most definitely support.

One of the most meaningful sections of the bill deals with reforming the dispute resolution system. This goes back to a promise that the Liberals made back in the 2011 budget to review the system that is available to insurance claimants. Currently, FSCO, the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, administers the process. If a claimant is denied certain coverage as prescribed by their statutory accident benefits by an insurer, they can initiate a dispute. These benefits must be purchased by drivers, by law.

There are currently three injury classifications under the statutory no-fault coverage on auto insurance. These

include minor injuries such as sprains or soft tissue injuries, non-catastrophic injuries, and catastrophic injuries, which include things like paralysis or loss of limbs. Most disputes are about whether or not someone's injuries are classified as minor or non-catastrophic. This is a bit of a grey area, so it leads to many disputes between claimants and insurers.

If someone tries to dispute a decision made by their insurer, they must first go through a mediation session with a FSCO-employed mediator. As members have mentioned, the Auditor General noted in 2011 that the mediation phase was a severe bottleneck that caused a significant delay in the overall process. At that time, there were 30,000 cases in the backlog. Now, that number has since been decreased to roughly 16,000, but this sizable backlog continues to delay settlements being reached and adds additional costs to the system. All parties can agree that the current practice leaves a lot to be desired.

Bill 171 seeks to move the entire dispute resolution system to the Ministry of the Attorney General's Licence Appeal Tribunal, which is already in place. This would simply move administrative costs, not reduce them. It would now be funded by tax dollars and not come out of auto insurance fees. If you happen to pay taxes and insurance fees, you're just paying from somewhere else.

1650

Lastly, this bill does not get to the heart of the matter when it comes to the long wait times of disputes. The issue is why so many of these cases end up as disputes in the first place. The PC Party has in fact recommended using existing medical assessment guidelines to have truly independent third party assessments. This would have a number of benefits. It would make injury classifications more black and white. By removing the grey area that is currently found in the injury guidelines, we will and could very possibly eliminate the need for many of these disputes.

Madam Speaker, we've also had some strong feedback from lawyers representing both insurers and claimants regarding Bill 171's prohibition of using the court system when a dispute involves a no-fault claim. Today, Ontario has a hybrid insurance system that accommodates both tort claims, such as negligence and pain and suffering, as well as no-fault claims, such as accident benefits or home care. When disputes are not resolved in mediation, the current practice is for the plaintiff and defendant to decide whether or not to pursue the matter either in court or through an arbitrator. If the bill passes as it is, those faced with cases that involve both a tort and no-fault component would have to appear in court and in front of a tribunal separately. This is inefficient and costly, and, most importantly, it does not make sense from the claimant's point of view.

As I had previously mentioned, lawyers representing both sides of this issue have problems with that particular section of the bill. I'm sure they will reiterate these concerns in committee, where I hope we can in fact strengthen Bill 171.

In summary, this is a bill that the Liberals are clearly fast-tracking through the House in an effort to get a win on auto insurance before the budget is released and a potential election.

With the fact that good weather is fast approaching, I'm actually looking forward to contacting my insurance broker, Ross Insurance back in Chatham, to get my little sports car back on the road and enjoy this great weather. By the way, the insurance rates aren't so bad, either.

But, again, despite the convenient timing of this particular bill, there are some good elements in the bill, and this is one that I and my caucus will be supporting at second reading.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I was listening intently to the member's presentation. It never ceases to amaze me around this building when parties get up, and they'll criticize and tear a thing apart, and then they'll say, "But we'll be supporting it." You've got to wonder.

The real problem here is this: Fraud is a big part of this. There's no doubt about it. You've got your chop shops. You've got your fake medical claims and stuff—all these things. Certainly, that plays a part. But with all due respect, there's a good percentage of people in this province who drive without any insurance at all. That's the guy who hits you, and then they have no insurance. But our government, in its infinite wisdom—and the police only act under the legislation—they don't do anything to these people. They don't lose their licence for not being insured—they might get a little fine—they don't suspend them. They don't do enough to go after the people who are driving illegally in the province. That happens all the time; they don't enforce it.

The problem in this province is that the police don't have the resources to stop every car that they think may be insured or may not. They might pull you over if you don't have your updated sticker, but they haven't got the time, the energy or the resources to patrol it. That's another huge thing.

The member mentioned this insurance company leaving Ontario. They probably left Ontario because they were only making a 75% profit instead of a 150% profit. That's why they left. If you look back in the history of Ontario, maybe the odd little one, but no insurance companies have ever gone under. No banks have gone under in Ontario.

Someone is making a lot of money somewhere, and all of a sudden they're not making enough, so they decide to leave and put pressure on people and on the government by going back to the States or wherever they come from. If that's the way they operate, go ahead.

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by addressing some of the comments by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. He sounded a little disappointed that no insurance companies or banks have gone under in Ontario. I think that's a good thing. It's a good thing that

no bank and no insurance company has gone under. I'm a little confused as to why he sounded disappointed.

The other thing I wanted to speak on: I've heard a lot of members say that they support the bill, but they are suggesting that insurance rates are not reducing. I'm just going to say this: If members think that an insurance company is actually going to send a renewal notice saying, "Your insurance just went down 15%," that's not the way the market works. But if you shop around, you will most likely get a reduction in your insurance.

When my constituents call me and say they're facing an increase, what I tell them is to shop around. I have found many instances where my constituents have called me back and said—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: There have been many instances where my constituents have called me back and said—

Interjection.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: They first call to say that their insurance rates have gone up. I counsel them to shop around, and there have been cases where they have called back and said, "Yes, insurance rates have gone down." So you have to shop around.

On the issue of some of those anti-fraud provisions, as the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek himself acknowledged, fraud is an issue, so this bill is a good start in trying to fight that fraud.

In the meantime, I also want to say that there are close to 50 insurance companies in Ontario that filed reductions last Christmas, and I believe on April 1, another bunch of insurance companies filed for rate reductions. We'll see what happens.

If I can leave you with one thought: Shop around if you want your insurance rates—

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to be here today and speak to this bill for a couple of moments.

I think the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex did a pretty good job of summation and a good analysis of the bill.

I'd like to give a shout-out—we're advertising insurance companies. I'd like to mention my insurance company back home: Cam-Ron Insurance. I've been with them all my life. My father was—

Mr. Paul Miller: That's advertising.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He used them before me. Anyway, they're a long-time insurance broker back in Sarnia–Lambton doing an excellent job.

As far as the bill here, as our member from Chatham–Kent–Essex said, we in the Tory caucus intend to support it at second reading. We want to get it to committee and improve the bill. Bills always can be improved at committee. I had two private members' bills myself that went to committee. They were in pretty good shape to start with, but we had improvements when it got to committee. They've been passed into legislation, I'm proud to say, along with—my colleague from Hamilton

East–Stoney Creek actually was a cohort with our bill, One Call. That's an example of working together in this Legislature. We worked together and we got that bill through—

Interjection: You just call one number.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, One Call. That's what the insurance business uses: one number. So they just had one call to make.

Maybe, John, when the Attorney General leaves, that's something you could do. You could start up an insurance business and have a one-call system and we could all call you; right? Everybody would know you.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You don't want to be called when you retire. He says, "Don't call me. I've had enough calls over the years. Don't call me anymore."

It's going to be an interesting debate here this afternoon. I look forward to hearing from the rest of the members from all over the province. Everyone brings a different perspective to these debates, so I look forward to this debate. There are a lot of serious issues around insurance. As the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said, I have family in law enforcement, and people do drive without insurance. So anything we can do to discourage that, all the better.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex for his comments. I listened intently. I see that there is a certain degree of consensus around the need to fight fraud and the priority that all of our constituents place on reducing auto insurance rates. We're all getting those phone calls from constituents who are not only not seeing their rates go down, but are actually seeing their rates increase.

1700

As legislators, we have an obligation to do more than advise our constituents to shop around. We have to ensure that there is an appropriate regulatory framework in place to govern how rates are set and how victims of accidents have recourse to justice if insurance companies are denying their benefits, if they are unable to get insurance, and if they are a victim in an accident.

So our concern on behalf of the NDP caucus is that this legislation goes nowhere near far enough to address those two concerns: fighting fraud and reducing premiums. We see that there are some modest initiatives that will take some baby steps toward reducing fraud, but the legislation, in fact, has a very negative impact on accident victims. It creates, now, a two-tier system, where people who want to seek recourse for insurance companies' decisions now have to go to a Licence Appeal Tribunal to argue their claim and they would have to go to the court to argue a no-fault suit. So it disadvantages accident victims in this province.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to thank the members from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Mississauga East–

Cooksville, Sarnia–Lambton and, of course, London West. Thank you so much for your input with regard to our point of view on Bill 171.

It was mentioned in some of the debriefs that it's a bad scenario when people who are unable to get insurance continue to drive without that insurance. I have some serious concerns about what can happen, especially when, as was pointed out by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, it's usually those bad drivers that hit you.

The comment was made earlier about State Farm: Why did they leave? I'm sure they have their reasons, although—

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Well, they sold off a portion of their business to Desjardins. I still love their motto, "You're in good hands with State Farm." I guess now this government has taken over that motto. I'm hearing someone else over there saying that you're in good hands.

Interjection: You're in safe hands.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Oh, you're saying "safe hands" now.

I look at the opportunities, and it's been mentioned in this House, to shop around. The former Attorney General and now minister without portfolio had commented that perhaps he and I could do a commercial for Grey Power or something of that nature. Of course, the NDP could do a commercial for that other insurance company that says, "15 minutes will save you 15%."

But we seriously need to protect victims and ensure that they get the proper financial reimbursement that is coming to them.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: As has been the focus of the debate this afternoon and throughout the duration of this bill, high auto insurance rates are a concern right across this province, whether it's people down south or people all across the north, especially in Kenora–Rainy River. The NDP has really prioritized this issue as a party. In fact, we incorporated it in our 2013 budget asks where we asked for a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates.

Now, the Liberals wouldn't come all the way. They wouldn't commit to implementing the 15% savings in one year. They've kind of drawn that out. What we've actually heard from people, what I've heard from people who have contacted my constituency offices, is that they've actually seen their rates increase. Now we're seeing bills like this, where it's virtually devoid of any cost-reducing measures for consumers. It does have some measures in place, as has been mentioned many times, to reduce costs on the part of auto insurance companies, but all consumers basically get is the flashy title of Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act.

In Kenora–Rainy River, as I said, affordable auto insurance rates are a top priority. In 2013, I sent out a budget survey where 90% of my constituents said that lower insurance premiums are a high or an extremely

high priority. In Kenora–Rainy River, as I mentioned earlier today, public transportation is virtually non-existent and people really do rely on their vehicles to get from point A to point B to access things like groceries, work and health care.

In fact, this past Friday, I participated in the provincial day of action against high hydro rates. Transit in the north, which in the north of course means road maintenance and affordable auto insurance rates, was a key theme. For people living in a place like Red Lake, where the protest was held, again, on hydro, it's very difficult to talk about any of the issues facing northerners without transit coming up, especially in the case of a place like Red Lake, which is 175 kilometres north of the Trans-Canada, where the only real accessible way in or out of the community is by road, because often a \$600 flight in and out of the community is just not practical for a lot of people. We don't have the luxury of public transit.

With the necessity of having a vehicle, that means vehicle payments, it means vehicle maintenance and of course it means gasoline, which is high enough in urban places that are along the TransCanada, like Dryden. It's even more expensive when you go to more remote communities like Red Lake, Sioux Lookout and in the far north.

It also means auto insurance, which is mandated by the province. Because having auto insurance is required by law, I believe, as legislators, we have a duty and an obligation to make it affordable. There needs to be a balance between the consumer's ability to access this mandatory service at a fair and reasonable cost and the company's ability to cover its costs. There needs to be that fairness, there needs to be that balance. Presently, the scale has tipped away from this needed balance in favour of insurance companies. Many of us recall the changes that were made by this government in 2010 which resulted in increased premiums and slashed accident benefits, where the accident benefits were essentially halved.

I saw this firsthand because at the end of August 2010, I was involved in a head-on collision just outside my house. I've mentioned this before. I required and my partner required some significant non-OHIP-insured health care services, and at that time, there was a lot of emphasis placed by our health care providers on when exactly this accident occurred. It was very obvious to us that the type of accident benefits we would be entitled to—in fact, we were entitled to, because I believe we had the collision on August 26, 2010, versus if we had been involved in this collision on September 1, 2010.

Since that time, my constituency offices and the constituency offices of my predecessor have been flooded by people who are upset to see their benefits decreased and their premiums increased despite having no changes to their driving record. Then, of course, we later found out that these changes that were made in 2010 by this present government actually saved the auto insurance industry \$2 billion.

Now, at a time when we in the NDP have made it abundantly clear that these savings have not materialized,

that they have not been passed down to consumers, the Liberals have come forward with this bill that again only reflects the needs of the auto insurance industry.

We should really take a look at some of the measures that are included in this bill, and two that I want to focus on in particular. The first is that by denying accident victims access to the courts and replacing them with a tribunal, it removes fundamental rights as citizens. It increases appeals costs for consumers because under the new tribunal system, if an accident victim is successful in proving that the insurance company should have paid the claim benefit, the insurance company is forced to pay only a tiny fraction of the legal cost. This is a significant change from the court system and it really places the burden on the individuals who are already injured, even if they have a very strong case.

1710

Interjections.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I would have expected a little more from members on the government side. There are a lot of riff-raff—a lot of discussion is going on on that side. This is a very serious issue for my constituents, and I would hope that they would pay attention.

The other thing is that if the accident victim is injured and it is someone else's fault, the victim now has to pay a lawyer to bring forward two entirely different cases in two entirely different systems: one in the court against the person who injured them, and this new arbitration against their insurance company, who denied them the benefits. Now, the accident victim will have huge extra legal costs and two different legal proceedings. None of these changes have anything to do with fighting fraud, but they have everything to do with making it easier for insurance companies to wrongfully deny benefits, delay settlements and make it harder for people to collect what they are rightfully owed.

The second point I want to address is that of pre-judgment interest. This bill would change a 30-year-old rule that has been very important to those who have suffered injuries in Ontario. Prejudgment interest on pain and suffering damages is intended to compensate an innocent victim when the negligent person's insurance company delays paying those damages. It basically ensures timely payment for pain and suffering.

Currently, insurance companies are required to pay 5% interest on whatever a person is owed for pain and suffering. If a serious injury occurs and a person is owed \$50,000 for pain and suffering and the insurance company delays paying for three years, they have to pay \$7,500 in interest. That may not be a lot, but it's an incentive for the insurance company to deliver, to make these payments. By making these changes included in this bill, if these provisions are passed and the pre-judgment interest rate is reduced to 1.3%, then the insurance companies stand to earn a 2.7% profit on the money of a person who is rightfully owed this money, for every year that they put off settling.

These amendments were introduced under the guise of fighting fraud and reducing automobile insurance rates

and they're presented as money-saving initiatives for insurers, but, clearly, the change in the interest rate has nothing to do with fighting fraud. In reality, this change is nothing more than another gift to Ontario's already profitable insurance sector, on top of the recent substantial cuts that have already netted insurance companies billions of dollars in profit.

In summary, there's a lot that needs to be done to restore the balance between a consumer's ability to access this mandatory service at a fair and reasonable cost and the company's ability to cover its cost—I want to stress that. It needs to be fair. No one is suggesting that insurance companies should be taking a loss, but it needs to be fair on both sides.

Aside from the flashy title of this bill, the bill completely misses the mark in restoring fairness to the auto insurance system and it clearly doesn't make this essential service affordable. I also question how effective it will be in cracking down on fraud as there is an obvious disconnect between the measures contained in this bill and eliminating auto insurance fraud.

I do think that we should maybe send this to committee. It will be an interesting experiment to see if it can be transformed into something meaningful. It will be interesting to see how much leeway the committee actually has to reform this bill, but, that being said, I look forward to making those changes.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm pleased to rise to speak regarding Bill 171, Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, 2014. We agree, as a government, to reduce auto insurance by 15%, and that is averaged over two years. We are well on our way toward achieving that goal; almost 5% has been reduced already since August 2013. Now we're taking steps to go even further by fighting fraud as well as reducing the overall costs of insurance. This is in order for it to directly benefit our Ontario drivers.

I know that this is very important to my community of Scarborough-Guildwood. Just this past weekend, I had an opportunity to speak with a father who was at a community centre with his two daughters. What he raised with me was the very high cost of insurance. I had an opportunity to share with him all that our government is doing to reduce the cost of insurance and to ensure that that is benefiting our drivers in Ontario. Of course, like my colleague who spoke before me, I advised that he contact his insurance company and ensure that he negotiates a better rate, because indeed rates are coming down, as we can see already with the 5% reduction that has been achieved since August.

But today, the legislation is speaking to how we can further transform the system in terms of the dispute resolution contacts and ensuring that disputes are settled faster, and also in terms of licensing and really professionalizing those that are providing health services to the system and ensuring that payments are received directly, that they get paid directly by the insurance

company, should they be licensed, as well as the time that vehicles are impounded. That is also a way to reduce the costs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments? The member for Kitchener-Conestoga.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's nice to see that the folks across the aisle are riled up about something today.

I did have a good chance to listen to the member from Kenora-Rainy River. I only have two minutes now, but I will be speaking to this later on this afternoon. She mentioned how she was in a car accident. I, too, unfortunately had a little fender-bender this past winter; the winter just seems to never end here. I was struck from behind on the QEW coming into Queen's Park one day. I figured I'd take this minute and 30 seconds just to share my personal experience.

It was a bit of an unfortunate morning. The lady behind me—we were all moving or getting out of the way to avoid an accident. I know she's all right. Her vehicle, of course, needed some repair, as did mine. But I want to thank my local insurance broker, Josslin Insurance—great guys. Just a quick phone call, seamless; they get you into the local body shop. Of course, I deal with Wendell Motors in Kitchener-Waterloo. Kevin Buckwald, he just takes care of me and it's seamless. So you know what? I've got to thank the insurance brokers in my community.

Of course, Kitchener-Waterloo is known for a significant insurance industry that employs thousands and thousands of people in our region, but more importantly, the commitment to our community—Manulife are obviously major contributors to our community, but also those insurance brokers who play a very key, key role in our community and provide an essential service to folks and are that conduit between policyholders and their insurance companies when mishaps like the member from Kenora-Rainy River had, as I did, this past winter—I'm happy to say that things are well.

But we do have a plan. I'm looking forward to outlining that plan that has been brought forward by my colleague from Elgin-Middlesex—Jeff Yurek; I guess I'll just say it. I'll share that with you in a matter of minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for London-Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to my colleague from Kenora-Rainy River for her debate notes. They were very informative, and I especially enjoyed listening to her examples in her riding.

Up north, as she mentioned before, people rely on transportation and it's not an option to take public transit. They are forced to drive their vehicles, because they need to get to work, they need to get to doctors' appointments or visit family or whatever the case may be. So they've got to pay what the insurance companies say.

Despite the fact that this bill—I mean, we're talking about the dispute resolution system and how it has

changed to two-tier. We on this side don't feel that that is a just way of dealing with the fraud issue, on an overview of how it's presented. But one thing that I do appreciate this bill does talk about is licensing medical rehabilitation facilities. That's something that I think was long overdue, because if you look at the reasons why insurance companies back in 2010 claimed that their costs were skyrocketing for running a business, it was because of accident benefits. Then they chopped those benefits down by half.

It would have been prudent at that time, if that was the reason, if they would have linked that to perhaps licensing the medical and rehab industry, because that's where things were coming through. People were staging accidents and saying they had whiplash or a sore back, and then they were getting prescriptions and medical treatment that they weren't really necessarily entitled to and suing on that basis, and that contributed to the fact that that particular sector of the insurance industry was contributing to that fraud. So at least that's in there.

I'm really interested to see, when this goes to committee, how those things will be picked over, and we'll get some really good feedback for the consultations that we'll be doing.

1720

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's a pleasure, as always, for me to have the chance to stand and rise and speak to this particular bill, Bill 171, if memory serves me correctly. I am very proud to serve as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, and I believe I spoke to this bill at the beginning of second reading.

This is something that's very important for our government as we continue to move very proactively with respect to our auto insurance rate reduction strategy—a strategy that, as other members have referenced on this side of the House, has been providing a great deal of progress for the people of Ontario. As those watching at home and those in the chamber would know, we promised in budget 2013 that we would, over the course of two years, be able to bring auto insurance rates down—on average, across the province—a total of 15%.

We have been working very closely with all of the different, very complicating, complicated and complex aspects of the auto insurance industry. We have taken into account the findings of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force, and we have taken some very concrete steps.

The good news, as I said a second ago, is that the steps that we have taken are actually providing those results. It was referenced by the member from Scarborough–Guildwood just a moment ago that we have now seen—over the course of, relatively speaking, a small number of months—a 5% decrease, on average across Ontario, in auto insurance rates. That is directly as a result of the fact that our government has taken the initiative to make sure that we continue to deliver these kinds of positive results.

I think it is important that, while opposition parties, particularly members of the third party—and I was happy

to hear the member from Kenora–Rainy River say that she would like this bill to get passed at second reading and get to committee. That's heartening and encouraging to hear. I think that it is important for people watching at home to recognize that while other political parties spend an awful lot of time talking about what they believe is important, there is only one party, one government, in this chamber that is actually delivering the results as promised, and that's the Ontario Liberal government. I look forward to continuing to work on this initiative.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: As I mentioned, affordable auto insurance rates are really a huge issue across this province. More needs to be done to strike a balance and make it affordable for people.

As I mentioned, people living in Kenora–Rainy River really don't have the luxury of public transportation. There are some very real and significant costs that are associated with driving our own vehicles, and people—in Kenora–Rainy River, especially—can't help but get resentful towards this government for not helping to ease their financial squeeze.

It's comments like those that are made by the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, where she kind of glibly counsels her constituents to just shop around, that really get people going in northwestern Ontario. We can shop around as much as we want, and we can find the best price, but you know what? That best price still isn't enough to make it affordable for people to get from point A to point B.

This is coming from a member who has the luxury of public transportation. Let me tell you, it really is a luxury, because there are people who, especially in the winter months, are completely stuck in their communities. There are concerns in places like Red Lake: How are we going to get the groceries to the community if we don't have access through our roads?

It's also a little frustrating and a little rich for that same member to be making those comments, that people can just shop around. This is coming from the government that has prioritized expanding what people in Kenora–Rainy River see as already excellent public transportation in the GTA. We don't have public transportation. To look at possibly going to the province cap in hand, saying that we're going to raise your taxes so you can fund transit down here, when we don't have that transit up here, is very, very frustrating.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm happy to rise today to speak on Bill 171, which we've been debating this afternoon, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act. We've had a lot of discourse back and forth—certainly urban/rural differences that we just heard. The member from northern Ontario has expressed some issues that are certainly different than in urban Ontario. This bill does have some positive aspects—definitely areas that need to be improved, which is supported by the

reservations of some medical and rehabilitation professionals.

The Progressive Conservatives certainly understand that the purpose of the bill is to attempt to keep the Liberals' promise that they made last year, from their budget, to keep the NDP happy, that said that they would reduce auto insurance by a 15% premium reduction. I haven't seen the reduction myself, but, you know, they say it's working. Again, I don't know if many of the drivers out there would say that it is working, that they've seen a 15% reduction in their insurance premiums, but it certainly left it—a decision, like that of so many other businesses, the inability to reduce auto insurance rates.

One of the main insurance companies, as mentioned before, has decided to leave Canada. So there are over one million people out of work in Ontario, we've lost 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in the past 10 years, and in the auto insurance, we've all heard about the loss of State Farm Insurance in Canada, which I was alluding to before. That held a significant 11% of the auto insurance market, and I'm sure you would all recognize their jingle: "Like a good neighbour, State Farm is there." I won't sing it, to save all the eardrums in the building. All I know for sure is that all of my neighbours are suffering from high insurance rates—I hear it all the time—and State Farm is no longer there because they can't afford to run their business in Ontario.

This is, unfortunately, just another notch in the Liberals' belt, another business, another company that's left, and jobs that have been lost in the province of Ontario. Among many problems, this company leaving our province means that there is one less company for Ontarians to choose from when buying auto insurance. It would mean paying higher rates than they currently are.

As the member from Caledon said, certainly the number one thing we hear about from all of our constituents is the hydro bills, struggling to pay their hydro bills, the increase in taxes that we've seen, even though the Liberal government promised a 15% reduction in auto insurance, which has yet to come to fruition, as I mentioned before.

Premiums in Ontario have actually climbed 17% since 2007. I mean, even Newfoundland was not even a close second and experienced increased insurance premiums at a total of 12% only.

Ontarians are suffering from high auto insurance rates, the threat of gas tax, high taxes, unemployment and rising debt, so how are the people of Ontario and the constituents, especially in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, expected to travel to work and around their communities? All these costs are building up upon them. It's certainly a lack of leadership. We've discussed insurance in committees—oh, my God—for years. There have been solutions out there I'm going to talk about a little later. I know I only have 10 minutes and the clock is ticking, but there have been solutions brought forward. The government has not shown leadership in acting on those solutions.

To make things worse, it is not Ontarians who are driving safely and abiding by the law who are being rewarded by this proposed 15% insurance reduction, but they did it so quickly to appease the third party here that they're actually proposing a 15% insurance reduction for those who have bad records. I know most people at home are saying, "What?" But I'm telling the truth. Recently, the Financial Services Commission of Ontario released the quarterly rate filings for auto insurance premiums, and one thing is clear: If you have multiple accidents or a drunk driving conviction on your record, you're going to get a premium reduction, they tell you.

The government has stated that the filings show premiums were down maybe 4% on average; however, the biggest reductions went to the non-standard insurers, and those are companies that act as an insurer of last resort for those drivers with multiple speeding tickets, accidents or drunk driving convictions. Their customers pay high premiums because they are the riskiest drivers on the road. So non-standard insurer Perth Insurance Co., under the direction of the regulator, filed for a premium reduction of 15%, the highest reduction of any company. The province's three other non-standard insurers—Pafco Insurance Co., Pembridge Insurance Co. and Echelon General Insurance Co.—filed for reductions of 14.5%, 12% and 18.7% respectively. My colleague and seatmate here, Jeff Yurek, the PC auto insurance critic, already stated last fall that Minister Sousa's premium reductions would disproportionately benefit bad drivers. I mean, really, could you get some policy right that makes sense, rewards the good drivers and doesn't reward the bad drivers?

1730

Yet again, I think it's pretty clear that the Liberals really don't have a good plan in action. The bill is more like casting a rod in the pond and, "We'll see if we get a bite." They got through the budget last year. I don't know what's going to happen with the budget this year, if the third party is going to support them or not, but we all wait with bated breath to see. Rather than following through on the promises that they made, they're just introducing this bill that we have today, that makes it sound as if they're taking action. Again, this half-measure will not achieve what the people of Ontario were promised, because everybody was saying, "Yes, I want a 15% reduction of my auto insurance." But did they really get it? My survey says, "Absolutely not." Maybe some of the bad drivers actually got something, as I stated, but not the drivers that should be credited with getting a reduction, that have the good records, or as a result of a better plan and actually working together to find a comprehensive plan to bring down auto insurance premiums for everyone, which the PC Party has put forward.

In the 2011 budget, the Liberals committed to reviewing the dispute resolution system that is available to insurance claimants, but despite the proposed review, mediation services will still conveniently remain an issue. In 2011, the Auditor General noted that mediation was a severe bottleneck that at the time had 30,000 cases

in backlog. It has come down now to about 16,000, but this backlog still delays settlements and adds costs and uncertainty to the system. I'm telling you, in committee, the stories would make you weep. We, as politicians setting policy, have to do something about that. The insurance system is not providing adequate, timely decisions for these people, and they are suffering. It takes 414 days to complete mediation. That's outrageous. How are people expected to wait around for this backlog to dissipate when they've suffered injuries in an accident that may cause them to go on disability or take a leave of absence from work? The backlog issue has not been properly addressed.

Again, my colleague Jeff Yurek has worked for over a year in consultation. We have a plan recommending the option for a claimant and insurer to use private mediators to get the backlog down. This gives them more choice to avoid these long queues. It's a publicly administered mediation process, but as I said before, those numbers are unacceptable, and people should not have to suffer the way they do while they're waiting, on the average—I think it was 414 days that I said.

Not only does our party want to use private mediators to reduce wait times, but we have also addressed the issue of why so many cases go to dispute in the first place. We recommend using existing medical assessment guidelines to have truly independent third-party assessments that would make injury classifications more black and white and eliminate the need for mediation in some cases.

The number one thing of the rising cost of insurance is fraud. How do we change that? Again, they've had a fraud task force. The reports have been presented to the Liberal government. There has been no leadership in making the changes. In Bill 171, they try to address some of the issues—to issue licences for health care providers that provide services to auto accident victims. It's an attempt to reduce fraudulent practice in health clinics that overbill insurers or bill for unperformed services, but as I said, the bill is really not enough. Fraud is estimated to cost the system between \$750 million and \$1.5 billion. That's just enormous. The Liberals, obviously, don't—otherwise, they would be taking greater action to address the issue. They don't believe it's costing the system that much. The anti-fraud task force report that I mentioned before, released in 2012—we're now in 2014—included 38 recommendations. This bill only addresses four of those recommendations.

Again, we need stronger legislation to provide an insurance system that's affordable and effective. There are lots of reports out there. We've had lots of committees. We need to make a difference in the auto insurance sector.

My time is just about up. I was pleased to speak for a short time this afternoon on this bill.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: I've been listening very attentively to the remarks by the member from Haliburton—

Kawartha Lakes–Brock. This is second reading. We've been debating this for quite some time now. What I've heard is that this is not 100% acceptable to the members. The reason why we are debating the bill here today is to send it on to the committee, where they will be debating it more. Then they will be hearing other stakeholders as well, and bringing it back, hopefully, as a much better bill.

The fact is that in the last year, as a government, we have approved a 15% reduction. This is already taking place. Next year it will be completed—the full 15%. We know rates are coming down—rates are coming down. I speak for my constituents as well, because they are working-class people and I know what it means to them. The fact is that by debating it and not sending it forward to bring it back improved, if you will, nothing is going to happen.

We know that we have to go after the fraud that exists within the system. We know that we have to license the health care providers, because it's an issue, as the members well know. We know that long storage is expensive. Again, this all adds to the various expenses that the insurance companies have to pay.

The bill is good. It may not be 100% acceptable, but I would say—you know what? Let's take it from here. Let's bring it back. Let's make it better. And let's do it as quickly as possible so we can send a message to the insurance companies and we can send a message to our people, because this is a good bill. It's going to help. Let's do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The next person—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I listened very carefully and attentively to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock as she spoke on this bill here today. One of the things she hit on—and I think it is the most important issue—is the fraud in the insurance industry.

This has been something that has been a problem for not weeks, not months, not years, but decades. Fraud and insurance: They've kind of been hand in glove for an awfully long time. I'm supportive of any attempt to try to reduce, with the hope of eventually—I don't think we'll ever eliminate fraud in the insurance business; we won't eliminate fraud in banking or anything else, either. But we've got to take the necessary steps to try to reduce that kind of fraud, because when there is a fraudulent claim made, it doesn't cost the criminals; it costs the honest people out there who work hard every day in a workforce here in Ontario. It's getting harder to find a job, certainly in manufacturing. But they work hard every day to pay the bills. When there is fraud going on in the insurance industry, they pay.

One of the things that we're concerned about in this bill is that in an inequitable way, it actually rewards bad drivers.

Mr. Michael Harris: Drunk drivers.

Mr. John Yakubski: As my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga says, drunk drivers. Well, they're bad drivers. If you're a drunk driver, you're a bad driver.

If you're getting rewarded by this bill for misbehaviour, I have a bit of a problem with that. Well, I don't have a bit of a problem; I have a real problem with that.

Let's see if we can get this thing ironed out, straightened out, fix the kinks, fix the problems. But at the end of the day, if we can reduce fraud in the insurance business, it is going to succeed in reducing the rates of every honest driver out there, and that will be a benefit to us all.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River for her comments. They were well taken.

I really laugh when I hear people stand up and say, "Oh, they're going to reduce your rates. They're going to do this and they're going to do that." In 45 years, I've never had a rebate from an insurance company, and I have a clean record. When is that going to happen? I'll wait and see.

The bottom line is, you have to look at what's really going on here. What's going on is, if an insurance company—for example, the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville said shop around. Well, I've got news for her. I just renewed my insurance. No claims, same cars—everything is the same. I went from one company and they raised it a considerable amount. I was a little concerned so I did phone another company. There was an \$1,100 difference, and I even got better coverage. But what the insurance companies do is that they'll offer you a good rate, and then you go with them, and then a year later it starts to go up again. In two years, you're right back where you started from.

1740

Speaker, with all due respect, you can talk about, "This is going to really work, and this is going to reduce rates." You know what? I'll believe it when the cheque's in the mail and I get my rebate. Then I'll believe it, and so will the other people in Ontario. It's never happened.

When insurance companies leave this province, do you know why they are leaving, Speaker? Because they're not making enough money. They're not making 150%; they are only making 75%. So they are going to go somewhere else where they can make the 150%. That's why State Farm left Ontario: because they weren't making enough. So where do you draw the line?

You know, the member from the north is saying, oh, yes, shop around. In a city or a town of 10,000 people where they've got nowhere to go and they don't have public transit, let's shop around for better rates. Give me a break, Speaker. Give me a break.

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

Minister without portfolio.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. Here we have another bill that everybody in the House

seems to agree on. We had another bill like that this morning. I think it was the family leave act. This bill has had eight or nine hours of debate now, and yet we can't seem to bring it to a vote. So once again I want to tell the people of Ontario what is really happening here.

You have the opposition party over there, and they are here to oppose government. I've been over there; I know how it works. You basically don't want to agree with anything that happens on this side, even though you like this bill.

You've got the third party that agrees with this bill, but they don't believe in the one issue that would really deal with these bills in a quick and expedient fashion to get them to second reading and get them to committee and to third reading. What's that, Speaker? We need a programming motion, a time allocation motion. It doesn't matter what you call it, Speaker, but they don't support time allocation.

I'm all in favour of the open debate that we have in this Legislature. It's one of the real democratic rights that we have as Canadians, and I'm very proud of our parliamentary system. But the reality is, even though we all agree on this bill, in a minority government, unfortunately, these bills cannot come to a vote until ultimately some sort of a deal is worked out. The people out there in television land must be thinking, "How is it possible that these people agree on these bills and yet it takes"—there was a bill, the Local Food Act, that I think was given 25 hours of debate, on a bill that we all agreed on.

Let's get on with it. Let's call the vote on this bill. Let's move it to second reading. Let's get it done.

Interjections.

Hon. John Gerretsen: You know I've hit a nerve when you hear the yelling and screaming over there. They know what I'm telling is the truth. Let's get on with it.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister responsible for seniors, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, and of course the latest speaker, the minister without portfolio. He says he'd like to get on with it. Well, you know, back to the half measures in the bills that this government brings forward: The Local Food Act? Talk about a toothless measure. We had to put some teeth into it when it got to committee finally.

This is only four recommendations of how many that were recommended by the anti-fraud task force? So really, we've set out a list of recommendations we'd like to see with auto insurance. We've asked them to steal any of our ideas. We have lots of white papers out there. We say the four pillars to change for auto insurance are the following.

Reduce excess bureaucracy: This Liberal government loves bureaucracy, so that is going to be hard for them to accept, probably, but it is what is needed.

Combat fraud: How many discussions do we have to have about fraud? It exists. It's causing our rates to go

up, and you haven't done anything about it in two and a half years.

The dispute resolution process: I named all the stats and the backlog and the mediation days—414. You should be embarrassed that you're running a government the way you run it.

Of course, our all-time favourite pillar of insurance reform: Increase accountability. That's a foreign topic over there on the Liberal side, increasing accountability.

They, again, bring in lots of bills that have—I don't know. What are you up to: 37 panels now for more discussions on accountability? Why don't you actually do something responsible for the people of the province of Ontario? We're talking about reform in the auto insurance industry. If you can't get that right—I agree with my colleague from Simcoe—Grey—just resign. Step down. Call the election.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I'm sure that it's 6 of the clock somewhere in eastern Ontario right now.

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I've been listening to the debate all afternoon and I felt that it was important to get my 10 minutes on the record here today on behalf of my constituents who I represent in Kitchener—Conestoga.

As I had mentioned before, the insurance industry in my region of Waterloo is quite significant. In fact, a lot of the major insurers call Kitchener—Waterloo home. I could list them all, but I know I only have 10 minutes and I know the members across here obviously want to hear what we have to say.

As we head into another provincial budget, which I believe is coming May 1, there really is one thing that will be on the mind of NDP leader Andrea Horwath, other than actually trying to make a decision as to what she'll do this time to prop up a scandal-plagued government; it will be, really, the auto insurance 15% that they so-called "got" in the last budget. This was a topic of debate last year during that budget deliberation.

The Liberal government has timely introduced Bill 171, the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act, to make sure that they will try to fulfill their 2013 budget promise to the NDP, which kept them in office another year.

Bill 171 was introduced on March 4, with urgency to pass before our 2014 budget. This time, there is more support from the insurance industry and brokers. Lawyers for both insurers and claimants support the majority of the bill but have some reservations, as do medical and rehabilitation professionals. But overall, this bill moves us relatively in the right direction. If there's one thing that we can all agree on in this House, it's that in fact auto insurance rates are high and that Ontario needs to change.

I will say to you that I just recently switched insurance companies. I got my auto insurance premiums down. I'm quite happy with my insurance company, so I don't quite have the concerns of other folks, but today I will speak up on behalf of those who do.

Under the current government, Ontario has far exceeded other Canadian provinces like Alberta, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and even Nova Scotia. Premiums have taken a spike of 17% since 2007, really because of a number of regulatory decisions made by the government. This puts an added strain on household budgets and families who already feel the pressures of high taxes, unemployment and rising debt.

Last year, the NDP proposed a rigid 15% off auto insurance rates to bring costs down. We have all heard that this is not really an effective way to reduce auto insurance rates. In fact, it is unsustainable. That's why the PCs have put forward a plan that is both effective and sustainable and will bring down premiums for everyone.

With the great work by my colleague the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, we have established four key pillars of reform. He has gone through in-depth consultations with drivers and experts from the legal, insurance—like those representing the Insurance Bureau of Canada—and medical communities. We would help eliminate red tape—crucial. We would fight the insurance fraud.

You know what? I had a great meeting in my office earlier on when this issue became more timely in the House, with Ralph from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. He was telling me how either he or a relative of his was at an intersection and making a left-hand turn. Obviously, there were a couple of oncoming vehicles this way and they waved him on to make the turn. It was a green light. He—or whoever he was telling the story of—went and made a left-hand turn, and of course the vehicle then proceeded to drive into him, or the one behind. I mean, this is clearly a scam, and this is where the fraud starts. It's an orchestrated—

Hon. John Gerretsen: You can't say that in here.

1750

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm talking about a story that is real, and you should have heard the first part of it; I'll let you read Hansard tomorrow.

Anyways, I was talking about insurance fraud, and this incident: turning left into a parking lot, vehicles from behind coming in and hitting you—well, you're turning into somebody else's lane. All of a sudden, tow trucks show up. They tow your car off to some garage, and the gentleman in the vehicle perhaps has to go get a lot of health work done to him etc. The bills rack up, insurance companies have to pay for this, and this is where the fraud starts.

I've actually been talking to people in my community, and I've said to them—I heard about an accident. One of them was explaining, and she actually told the story of how this happened to her. I caution drivers when they're on our roads today: If they're making a left-hand turn and somebody waves them on, that is a likely sign that insurance fraud is about to commence.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not if you're in Renfrew county—

Mr. Michael Harris: In Renfrew county, they—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Not in Barry's Bay.

Mr. Michael Harris: Anyways, it happens elsewhere in Ontario, and we have to look out for this, because this is what happens: You're innocently waved on, the driver turns in and smacks it up, and the bills just come flowing in. That's just my quick insurance fraud story, and I'm sure we can come back to that, but I encourage drivers out there to just forget about the guy in the car. Tell him to come on and pull in, and everything will be good—because, at the end of the day, you'll be at fault.

Back to my plan. I talked about those four key pillars. I talked about the fact that we wanted to eliminate red tape. I just touched on fighting insurance fraud. We talked about making the dispute resolution process more effective and ensuring that auto insurers are accountable to customers.

I want to outline, in the last three minutes that I have, those four pillars that my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London outlined. This is the PC auto insurance action plan:

(1) Encourage competition and reduce excess bureaucracy. We'll do this by adopting a file-and-use rate-setting process to allow companies to lower prices quicker, ensure greater market competitiveness and encourage a wider range of discount offerings for Ontario drivers.

(2) We'll reform the dispute resolution process so that, in the event of a claims dispute, people could opt for private mediations in order to reduce wait times and costs associated with government-appointed mediators—a novel idea. We would also establish a true independent, peer-reviewed medical assessment system by standardizing assessment procedures and requiring multiple assessments to be performed by medical professionals of the same specialization.

(3) This is an important one. It may not happen in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but it will perhaps happen in other jurisdictions, and that is to combat fraud. We will establish a special unit in the crown attorney's office—

Hon. John Gerretsen: We're already doing that. We're doing that.

Mr. Michael Harris: Now, the former Attorney General is here, actually, so I'm glad he's listening to this. Now he's a minister without a portfolio; I think he's still got one under the desk, but anyways.

We're going to establish a special unit in the crown attorney's office to investigate and prosecute fraud—an action that has proven successful in places like New Jersey and Britain.

We're going to use the Health Claims for Auto Insurance system—an electronic billing system for health care clinics—to help identify abnormal billing patterns. We would advocate for the implementation of the recommendations from the anti-fraud task force report back in November 2012.

(4) We're going to increase accountability. We're going to do this by ensuring a fair, well-functioning

marketplace for auto insurance by making senior insurer executives personally and financially liable for the conduct of their company.

I know I've got a minute and 20 left. I'll just highlight those four bold PC auto insurance action plan items: We're going to encourage competition and reduce excess bureaucracy, we're going to reform the dispute resolution process, we're going to combat fraud and we're going to increase accountability—four easy things that we will put forward. I'm thankful to my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London for bringing forward those items.

I'm happy, though, that the Liberals have taken sections of our action plan and used them as a resource when drafting Bill 171 as part of their cost-reduction strategy, instead of really mandating a 15% reduction. Taking a unilateral cut would have created several unintended and negative consequences that, earlier, my colleague from Nipissing–Pembroke etc. talked about—them actually giving reductions to bad drivers. We have heard in this House a question that my colleague has put forward, highlighting just that, where we're actually giving drivers who have been convicted with impaired driving convictions an auto insurance reduction. That just doesn't make sense. We have got to get this right—follow the four steps.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the time today.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HYDRO RATES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with an answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy. He will have up to five minutes to debate the matter.

The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. To the government member opposite, a local couple with a 790-square-foot home received an electricity bill in February of \$641—\$234 was a delivery charge, so they have some questions.

I asked the Minister of Energy last week, why is their heating bill so high? Is it delivery—the cost of transmission? We know that locally, at Caledonia, the new power towers marching in from Niagara have yet to be strung with wires because of threats from native militants. They have now been standing wireless for eight years.

Is it the cost of regulation and the lack of competition? With prices being set by government decree through long-term high-priced contracts, we raise that question.

Is it generation? OPG is still plagued with cost overruns. Both OPG and Hydro One suffer from high labour

costs and top executives have the highest salaries in the public sector. As opposition, we propose opening both OPG and Hydro One to competition.

Is it the cost of fuel? There is nothing cheaper than coal, or water power for that matter. The coal plants closed just before this hard winter, and oversupply from wind leads to spilling water over dams, wasting nuclear power or selling electricity over the border at a loss. Our gigantic Nanticoke generating station—it's the largest of its kind; it's a billion-dollar asset—sits empty. The pipeline has received environmental approval. We ask why not run natural gas and biomass through Nanticoke? Is it because there is no demand for electricity because of the loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs?

Is it your government's Green Energy Act? Your act fosters subsidized, inefficient wind and solar, producing power often when we don't need it. At other times, it's not dependable—again, only when the wind blows or the sun shines. We can't create a sustainable, renewable industry by forcing consumers to pay excessive prices.

We feel Ontario needs to get back on track. We could make great gains. For starters, scrap the Green Energy Act. That's something we will do. Implement a moratorium on wind turbines until the jury is in on the health and environmental studies. We will not sign any more expensive FIT contracts and we'll take a hard look at the existing ones.

So why are people having trouble paying their bills? Is it your debt retirement charge? Is that not paid off, or are you dipping further into the cookie jar, borrowing more, using it as some kind of a slush fund? The budget-leaking team, the BLT, has an April 23 date for an announcement to keep this debt retirement charge on bills until 2016. What is that all about? Why is this stranded debt such a moving target? With respect to the debt retirement charge, I received a tweet from Gord Drimmie asking @Bob_Chiarelli "May we please have gas plant cancellation costs listed as a separate line item on our electricity bill?"

Is it your government's HST? The list goes on. Is it because of the cancelling of the natural gas generating stations by your government? We in this Legislature have seen the domination of questions with respect to that \$1.1-billion cost. Was it to buy votes? By the intentional destruction of email evidence—again by your government—by a Liberal-employed computer hacker, Peter Faist, hired illegally to wipe clean computers in the Premier's office. Is it mismanagement? Is it lack of a plan?

1800

I will point out that we have a plan; it's titled Paths to Prosperity: Affordable Energy. With our policy, our plan, once we're given office and a chance to manage this file, we can guarantee cheaper rates under a Hudak government than under the Liberals. When we were in government, our rates were 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour. You charge 12.4 at peak. Why is that?

It goes against basic economics. The demand has gone down; your price has gone up.

I ask again: Why the high prices? Is it OPG cost overruns, Hydro One inefficiencies, high salaries? Is it the cost of smart meters, the cost of the smart grid?

You've doubled the rates since your government has been in power. You're slated to jump rates another 46% in the next two years.

What do I tell this couple heating a very small home? They cannot afford to heat that house.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. I would like to acknowledge the co-operation of my colleague across last week when I was not available to do the late show. I much appreciate his rescheduling the late show with me.

The question actually relates to a World Trade Organization decision which has to do with domestic content requirements in Ontario clean energy agreements. The short answer to his question is that Canada, the European Union and Japan reached an agreement on an implementation period of 10 months to implement a World Trade Organization ruling, to bring Ontario's Feed-In-Tariff program into compliance with that World Trade Organization decision.

What does this mean? It means the deletion of one line in the bill. A lot of the rest of this has been an interesting set of largely unfounded allegations. Let's just go through some of the things that the member asked about and talk about a few of the things he may have missed.

Through Ontario's Green Energy Act, some 31,000 good, high-paying manufacturing jobs have been created here in the province of Ontario, through investments in renewable energy and conservation as well as the smart grid, energy technology and transmission and distribution upgrades.

It's worth pointing out that 11 years ago, when our government had the privilege and responsibility of assuming the reins in this province, Ontario was a net buyer of electricity. Today we are a net seller. Today Ontario earns some—last year, it was \$350 million in export of electricity to jurisdictions surrounding us. The year before, I believe it was \$500 million. Our electricity generation is in fact contributing to keep down the price of energy.

The member mentioned the debt retirement charge. I really can't help but pick up on that one. I would refer listeners to the Auditor General's website; that's auditor.on.ca. You've got to go back a little bit. This would be the 2010 Auditor General's report. If my memory serves me correctly, it's somewhere around page 23 that you'll find the Auditor General talking about the reduction of the debt retirement charge. The Auditor General will point out that, following the attempted sale of the former Ontario Hydro, offloaded on the taxpayer was a great deal of long-term debt incurred in building a lot of the energy assets that Ontario still has and that are still in use. The Auditor General says, in part, that initially there was very little progress in paying this amount down, and then goes into the years in which our

government has been in office and points out that since the government took office, that amount has been steadily reduced. How much was that? According to the Auditor General, that was \$20.6 billion.

This government believes in addressing debt the old-fashioned way: We pay it down. That debt will be off the government's books in the next few years. I'm not certain of the exact date, but it is a legacy debt inherited from when the member opposite's party was in government. When in government, they cranked up the burning of coal by about 25%. To that end, I would specifically ask people who live in the GTA, when was the last time that you remember a smog alert day? I think

there were two or three last summer. If memory serves me correctly, either the summer previous or the summer before that, there were none. So instead of a few smog alert days a week because of the airshed being contaminated with burning coal to generate electricity at peak times in the summer, today we are no longer burning coal to generate electricity in the province of Ontario. People have a modern grid, people have clean air, and that is what Ontarians want their electricity system to be: sustainable, affordable and reliable.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We will adjourn now until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1806.

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France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
John O'Toole, Jagmeet Singh
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Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
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Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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