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Tuesday 17 February 2015

Mardi 17 février 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 17 February 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 17 février 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION
PLAN ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME
DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE
DE L'ONTARIO

Ms. Hunter moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Associate Minister.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today before the House for the second reading of Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014. This bill commits our government to introducing a new mandatory provincial pension plan, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, by January 1, 2017.

Over the past several months, I have travelled across the province to discuss our plan with Ontarians. I've spoken with countless individuals from business, labour organizations and associations, families and communities. These conversations produce a diversity of opinion, but the common thread I am hearing is that people are concerned about retirement security. They are concerned that there is a gap between what they have and what they will need. This concern is exactly why we have introduced this bill: to move to close this gap and help give the people of this province financial security that they deserve in retirement.

From Thunder Bay to Toronto, from Windsor to Ottawa, I've heard from people who are concerned about their futures and their children's and grandchildren's futures. When I hear people's stories, listen to their concerns, and talk to them about their futures, it really solidifies for me why this issue is on everyone's minds and why it's such an important topic.

Retirement security is not just a financial issue. It is not economic or actuarial. It is about people. No matter where we're from, people are talking about the lives

they're looking to create now and for the future. Whether it's a young couple sitting down for a meal in their new home and talking about growing old together; new parents talking about their baby's future; or current retirees talking about how their kids and grandkids will be prepared for their golden years, all of these people are talking about their futures. Underlying all these conversations is the question of how we're going to afford those dreams now and for the future. It's in listening to these concerns that our government made the decision to take action by moving forward with the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

As Canadians, we are fortunate to have a strong, three-pillar retirement system that is already in place. Old Age Security and the guaranteed income supplement make up the first pillar, in addition to the GAINS program in Ontario. The Canada Pension Plan makes up the second, and workplace pensions and other tax-assisted savings make up the third. For several years, this system has been helping many workers in Ontario to achieve their retirement savings goals. In recent years, however, there has been a growing need for this system to evolve, to change, to meet the needs of our workforce. With a three-pillar system, we know that if one of the pillars cracks, the whole structure becomes less stable. That's what we're seeing now and on the horizon.

Several recent studies have shown that a significant portion of Ontarians are not saving enough to maintain their standard of living in retirement. In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Finance analysis suggests that about 38% of households with a primary earner between the ages of 45 and 59 may be undersaving for retirement.

There are several reasons for this. The proportion of Ontarians with workplace pension plan coverage is low and is getting lower. In 2012, only 34% of workers in Ontario—one in three—participated in a workplace pension plan. The numbers are even lower when we look at just the private sector, where only 28% are benefiting from membership in a workplace pension plan.

What this means is that people must rely on personal savings, but many aren't taking full advantage of the voluntary savings vehicles that are out there. In 2012, only 16% of people without workplace pension plans contributed to RRSPs. Add to this the fact that lifespans are increasing.

While increasing life expectancy is a sign of higher living standards and better health outcomes—something we should be proud of—it also places more pressure on personal savings, creating a need for them to stretch further. Those who have managed to put money away are

becoming worried that they might actually outlive their savings.

Many of the Ontarians I spoke to fear they will never be able to retire at all, while others are concerned that the physically demanding nature of their jobs will prevent them from continuing to work, before they are financially prepared to retire.

Add this up, and we have the potential for many workers to be living below their previous standard of living upon retirement.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that our current retirement system, while strong, is simply not meeting the needs of many Ontarians.

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According to a recent report released last month by the Public Policy Forum, more than any other subset of the population, a portion of middle-income earners, private-sector employees and young Canadians are more likely to experience a declining standard of living in their post-work lives. For these at-risk groups, government programs such as the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and guaranteed income supplement will be inadequate in providing sufficient income replacement. This trend is deeply concerning for our government.

Over the next 20 years, the number of seniors in Ontario will almost double. When a growing portion of our population faces inadequate savings, they will spend less. When that happens, consumption has the potential to slow along with growth. Further, this places pressure on our economy and those publicly funded institutions, like health care, that we hold so dear. That's not good for people. That's not good for business. That's not good for the economy.

We know that Ontarians expect leadership. That's why we need to take action now to ensure that future generations can have the financial security they deserve going forward. The cost of inaction is simply too high. Mr. Speaker, we have been clear that Ontario's preferred solution is the enhancement of the Canada Pension Plan. The CPP is a great example of a strong public institution. It is an efficient and effective program that is fully portable across the country. It is already supporting a modern and mobile labour force.

Unfortunately, the CPP does not offer a large enough benefit to ensure financial security in retirement. In 2014 the maximum CPP benefit was about \$12,500 while the average benefit paid in 2013 was only \$6,800. Ontario has advocated for CPP enhancement since 2010, with the Premier and finance minister leading national conversations on the issue. Unfortunately the federal government said no and shut down any and all discussions on this issue despite a willingness on the part of the provinces and territories to move forward.

Of course, we know that just because you don't talk about an issue, it doesn't mean it's not there, no matter how long you ignore it. When one pillar is weakened, the whole structure is unstable. That's why our government made the choice to act now and build in more retirement income security and move forward with our plan. After a

lifetime of contributing to the economy, we believe people deserve a strong and secure retirement.

The ORPP would be the first of its kind in Canada, supporting working Ontarians who do not have a comparable plan. It would build on the key features of the Canada Pension Plan to address the retirement needs of a modern, mobile, 21st-century workforce. Retirement experts recommend that people aim to replace 50% to 70% of pre-retirement earnings to maintain a similar standard of living in retirement.

As announced in budget 2014, the ORPP would aim to replace 15% of an individual's earnings, between a low earnings threshold and a maximum annual earnings threshold. It would require equal contributions to be shared between employers and employees, not exceeding 1.9% each on earnings up to an annual maximum of \$90,000. Combined with CPP, this would supplement voluntary savings measures and provide a secure retirement income floor for participants for life.

The ORPP would also be designed to ensure that benefits be earned as contributions are made. Over time, the ORPP would expand pension coverage to more than three million working Ontarians, helping to supplement their retirement income by ensuring a predictable, stable source of funds for life indexed to inflation. It would be managed by a publicly administered entity at arm's length from government, which would leverage the experience of Ontario's highly regarded public pension plans and strong financial services sector. It would pool longevity and investment risk.

We committed to consulting with Ontarians to ensure we are creating the best plan possible for the people of this province. As part of this process, in December we released a consultation paper that outlined the government's current thinking and preferred approach on key design features of the ORPP. The purpose of this paper was to gain input and feedback on essential components in the design of the ORPP, including:

- defining a comparable workplace pension plan;
- determining whether the ORPP's minimum earnings threshold would mirror the CPP's threshold of \$3,500; and
- defining how best to address the needs of self-employed individuals to achieve retirement income security.

Our government's preferred approach is to define "comparable plan" as "defined benefit" and "target benefit multi-employer." This is because these plans most closely mirror what we're trying to accomplish with the ORPP, like providing a benefit for life, including mandatory employer contributions and locking in funds. We recognize that defined contribution plans are an important part of the retirement savings landscape, but they can fall short in providing that secure retirement income floor that people need and rely on.

The second major focus is determining what the minimum earnings threshold should be. While we recognize that all Ontarians share the need to save for retirement, for some having a job does not guarantee sufficient

income to escape poverty. We do not want to place an additional financial burden on these individuals and families. At the same time, though, we need to strike a balance to ensure people are maximizing their benefits in the long term.

This is especially true for people who might experience periods of low earnings, like young people or recent immigrants. For a majority of low-income earners, Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan do a pretty good job in terms of income replacement. So we have presented a preferred option of mirroring the Canada Pension Plan's \$3,500 minimum earnings threshold.

Our third major focus is determining the proper treatment for the self-employed. Currently, under the rules of the federal Income Tax Act, the self-employed have a unique status as both the employee and the employer. Under these rules, individuals would not be eligible to contribute to the ORPP. What our government has done is committed to consulting on how best to assist self-employed individuals since achieving a secure retirement future is important to all Ontarians.

As well, we've made a commitment to boost financial literacy across all age groups and demographics. This way, while the ORPP will provide a secure floor, people themselves can be empowered to better use the voluntary tools out there to save.

Over the past several weeks I've been to all corners of the province. I have met with business, both large and small, of all types; labour; organizations and associations representing a wide range of workers from artists to mechanics, from doctors to sheet workers, financial planners to entrepreneurs, individuals and families from across the province, to get their views on these key design questions. We have received important feedback, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to incorporating the ideas of Ontarians as they move forward with the design of the ORPP.

There are some who will tell you that Ontario can't afford the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan or that now is not the time to act. What I'm hearing is that we can't afford not to act. As we move forward with the ORPP, we have been mindful of the impact on business and we're taking steps to minimize these impacts.

For instance, in the budget we outlined that enrolment would occur in stages, starting with the largest employers, and contribution rates would be phased in over two years. This would especially assist small business with the transition and help lessen the short-term impact. The reality is that today the cost and administration involved in certain workplace pension plans have made it difficult, if not impossible, for some employers to offer them. The ORPP would allow employers who may not otherwise be able to offer their employees the opportunity to contribute to and accumulate benefits—to help them save for their retirement years.

We're also hearing from leading economists that the ORPP will have a positive impact on the economy. Former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge has said in his analysis that the short-term costs of such an enhance-

ment would be outweighed by the long-term economic benefits.

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In his 2014 report, *Macroeconomic Aspects of Retirement Savings*, Dodge states: "An increase in household savings will have a small negative effect on aggregate demand in the very short run, an effect which will automatically be offset in part through the exchange rate and other structural adjustments and which should be offset by an easier monetary policy and/or increase in public sector or agency borrowing to finance infrastructure investment. In the longer run, higher household savings would enhance growth of output and incomes."

This means that more retirement savings now would mean more capital being available for investment, which, in turn, would increase productivity and improve economic growth and job creation.

Dodge further states: "A higher saving rate would underpin higher retirement income without increased tax rates on the working population." This would support "a higher investment rate ... hence higher productivity, larger investment income, and increased government revenues."

That's good news for Ontarians and for Ontario businesses. As one small business owner from Markham rightly said at a recent consultation, "When we share a little, we gain a lot."

While not easily quantifiable, the security we can give to workers is important for business, and our economy, to be successful. We know that employees who feel more secure about their own futures tend to be more productive. More than that, we know that business owners care about the well-being of the people who work for them. This is something that I saw first-hand when I was vice-president at Goodwill Industries.

During my tenure there, the Ontario government raised the minimum wage for the first time in nearly a decade. As many will know, wages are a major expenditure of Goodwill. We worked with the government through the lead-up to the implementation. We planned and we found ways to absorb the costs. What I remember most about when the increase went into effect was not the cost to our business; it was the confidence the increase in wages gave to some of our employees. That confidence translated into more productive workers who were able to feel secure in the take-home pay that they were receiving.

We believe that a workforce with a secure pension will continue that momentum, and that confidence will spread throughout the economy. That's what we're working towards for 2017. In order to get there it is essential that we work quickly and effectively towards solidifying the details of the plan now. That is why we are asking members of this House to support this bill.

This bill outlines our government's commitment and obligations to implement the ORPP and provides an overview of some of the key principles and features of the plan. Bill 56, if passed, would require this government to establish the ORPP no later than January 1, 2017. This is an ambitious goal but, as I have explained, we know the cost of inaction is too high.

Mr. Speaker, this bill lays out some of the rules governing the participation in the ORPP. To be eligible to participate in the ORPP an individual employee would have to satisfy the following criteria: The individual would have to be between 18 and 70 years of age. The individual would have to be employed with an eligible employer in Ontario. The individual could not be participating in a comparable workplace pension plan. The individual's annual salary and wages would have to be above a minimum threshold. The individual would not be receiving a retirement benefit from the ORPP. The bill also outlines some rules concerning contributions to the plan, eligible employment, and payment of the retirement benefits and survivor benefits.

The legislation, if passed, would give authority to the government to request and collect specific information, including personal information from employers, public bodies and the federal government, and would require disclosure of the information by the employers and public bodies for the purpose of establishing the plan.

Mr. Speaker, as outlined in the budget, we will establish an entity at arm's length from the government to administer the plan. The responsibilities of that entity would include collecting and investing contributions, and administering benefits, among others.

We want to emphasize that the contributions and any accruals from investment would be held in trust for the members and other beneficiaries of the ORPP. It would be managed for the benefit of workers and will not be included as part of overall government revenues.

As we move forward, we are continuing to leverage the expertise of the members of the Technical Advisory Group on Retirement Security. I would like to extend thanks again to these individuals for their advice, opinions and support: Keith Ambachtsheer, Susan Eng, Murray Gold, Melissa Kennedy, Jim Keohane, Bill Morneau and Barbara Zvan. In addition, we are pleased to have Michael Nobrega, former CEO of OMERS, as the implementation lead.

Together, the input from Ontarians and our pension experts will ensure that we'll be able to design the best plan possible for the people of Ontario. Passing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014, is an important step in strengthening the retirement income system in our province and ensuring that Ontarians can have confidence in their retirement futures.

This bill is about securing our collective futures. It's about building, for the people, the confidence and the security they deserve. Once in place, the ORPP would help millions of Ontario workers achieve the retirement future that they deserve. Put simply, it's the right thing to do. That is why I ask the members of this assembly to support the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Comments and questions? The member from—sorry about that.

Interjection: Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I just moved. It's a new riding, Speaker. Just kidding.

Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the associate minister's speech on Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Boy, we see it quite differently on this side of the House. We see it more like Jack Mintz. Jack Mintz says this is ridiculous, this is regressive, and this is completely the wrong idea at the wrong time.

The minister says she has had broad consultations. I think she must call ahead and say, "You like this? Yes? Oh, we'll come and talk." "You don't like this? Ah, I can't make it." That must be the way they're doing it, because they're not going into the real places in Ontario where the real people live and work and are scared about what this government plans to do, and that is to take more money out of their pockets and more money out of employers' pockets, which translates to less jobs in Ontario. If there's one thing that we don't need in Ontario right now, it's less jobs. With the implementation of this plan, that's what we'll get.

One of the things that Jack Mintz said—and I'm looking forward to having a longer period to speak on this bill at some time.

Young people today who are barely getting by, but are able to somehow cobble together enough to make a down payment on a home, would rather see their money invested in that home than in a pension plan that is a dream way down the road. Equity in a home is the greatest asset that most people ever accumulate. If they can do that, if they can be putting their money into equity in a home, they will be far better off than with this scheme of this government, which is completely politically driven and makes no sense whatsoever. I hope that before 2017, they see the light.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments or questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We all know that close to 66% of working Ontarians do not have a pension plan and look at their future and their elder years with angst, anxiety and fear. This is not good.

I am really privileged to come from an environment—to come from Sudbury—that is highly unionized and where lots of people have pension plans. I can tell you, it is a game-changer. It is a game-changer for my family, my 92-year-old in-laws. He has this little pension that comes every month, and they're able to budget and they're able to live their elder years in peace and security because they have budgeted all their years. Although the pension is not very big, it comes every month and they can count on it. I think that everybody in their elder years should be able to count on a little bit of money that, if you budget right, you're able to make ends meet.

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I have lots of fears about the programs that the Liberals are putting forward, because I want to make sure that the money that Ontarians are putting for their retirement will be used for that and not be used to fatten the pockets

of people working in the insurance industry and the investment brokers and everything else.

Is this a path that we should take? Sure; absolutely. We should make sure that people are able to live their elder years in dignity, with enough money to make ends meet. But the path from here to there—their goal is good, but the path they take to get there is worrisome, worrisome of money being squandered like they have done on so many other files. Look at auto insurance; look at eHealth; look at Ornge; look at everything else. It's worrisome. It has to be done right, and I'm not sure we're there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments or questions?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to add a few of my comments to the conversation this morning.

First of all, I would like to thank Associate Minister Hunter for travelling across the province and hearing from so many people and consulting with the people. It's important to have their input. I know that she has been speaking to not only businesses, to labour, to organizations, but to the people from the street, so that we can get this right. That is our intention.

I know that among her conversations, one thing is clear: Everybody is in agreement that Ontarians are not saving enough, and there is a concern about that, so we need to do something. In the absence of action from the federal government, we are coming forward with this plan.

We're taking our time to consult. I know that now, there's a consultation paper that is being released, and the plan design details are being developed, with time, in stages, so we're taking the time to get this right. We need to hear from the people. We need the people's input. It's very important.

I want to be clear: This is not a tax. This is a vehicle. It's a way to help people save for their retirement, so that they can retire with dignity, as my colleague said just a few moments ago.

We want to help businesses adjust. This is why it is planned to come into place in 2017. That will coincide with the reduction in employment insurance premiums. The enrolment would occur in stages, with the largest businesses first, and then the others following within another two years. We're being cautious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to end by saying that the cost of inaction is too high, as Minister Hunter said. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Speaker. It's great to be back in the Legislature debating bills. Unfortunately, we're debating the same old job-killing payroll taxes, and that's exactly what this bill is.

You can put the associate minister out there, and she has a wonderful smile and talks about how great this is going to be for everyone across the province, but when you talk to people at these consultations, and you hear

from them and their concerns about this—the government is still forging ahead.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke talked about the fact that these people seem to be hand-picked that are going to these consultations.

I can tell you that I received a call from the executive director of the Quinte Arts Council. She went to the consultation that was being held in Kingston. As she was driving from Belleville to Kingston, she was fully in support of this, because it sounded so nice. How could we not look out for the futures of people in Ontario by having a retirement pension plan of our own here in Ontario? But after hearing from all the businesses that showed up at that consultation, she left there saying, "This is the worst possible thing that we could do in Ontario." She is worried that the companies that are going to be affected by this are no longer going to be able to make charitable donations to her non-profit charity because it's going to cost them more, because indeed this is a job-killing payroll tax.

Mr. Yakabuski talked about Jack Mintz, a very well-renowned economist.

The president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Allan O'Dette, and all of his members are extremely concerned about this as well.

Employers are having a difficult enough time right now in this environment, trying to survive with soaring electricity prices, rising WSIB rates, and just the sagging economy that is the result of this government being in power for now 12 years, and they want to bring in more difficulties for our employers and our job creators out there. Let's think this over.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the Associate Minister of Finance for final comments.

Hon. Mitzi Hunter: I am very proud to rise and speak to Bill 56 today. I want to thank the honourable members who have spoken on this bill: the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Nickel Belt, my colleague from York South–Weston, and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Speaker, we are listening to the people of Ontario. We have consulted on the key design features of this plan. We want to ensure that we get this plan right, that we design the best possible plan for the people of Ontario.

We know that pensions are part of people's deferred compensation. It is part of their benefits, having worked a lifetime. When people retire, they deserve to retire with dignity and with some comfort.

Our plan for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is to provide a strong retirement income floor for people so that they will have income for life. If people retire without adequate income, there is the potential that that would slow consumption. If that happens, that's not good for the individual, that's not good for business and it's not good for Ontario's economy as a whole.

As my colleague has said, the time to act is now—the time to build and to design a retirement income system that is there for the people of this province. Over three

million Ontarians would have stronger workplace-based pension coverage as a result of this plan.

One of the individuals in our consultation has said that when we give a little, we gain a lot. That is what we intend to do by the development of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It's ensuring that we have a strong retirement system for all Ontarians.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to Bill 56.

I think that all of us have a certain sensitivity around the issue of a pension and the importance of a pension, but when I look at what we are looking at today, I'm reminded of the Premier's own words. Her words were, "People are not saving enough for retirement, and if we let this go unchecked, we're going to face a huge economic crisis." This she said in November 2013.

Naturally, there are a couple of reactions to this kind of comment. One of them is that you want to go and look and see if in fact it is true that it is a crisis, and are people saving? The second point you want to look at is, of all the economic crises that face this province, is this the one that requires immediate attention? On both counts, I found a different point of view.

For instance, on the issue of people not saving enough, people need to know that from 1990 to 2008, Ontarians led the country in savings. Ontarians put aside double the savings of the rest of the country. In the last two years, that has dropped down to the national average, but it is certainly clear that saving has always been part of the Ontario psyche.

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For a more up-to-date analysis, one need only go and look at the McKinsey consulting firm study that came out. Last week, they published the results of their findings: 83% of Canadians are on track to maintain their standard of living. In fact, Fabrice Morin, the principal of McKinsey, said that "if even 30% of the value of people's homes had been included as a financial asset, the proportion of Canadians with adequate savings for retirement would climb to 87%."

The comments made by Jack Mintz have already been referred to in the speeches this morning, but it's important to add here that, as he writes, while some Canadians have insufficient replacement income at retirement, it is widely agreed that three quarters to four fifths of Canadians do well, even projected into the future. This suggests that a scalpel is needed, not an ORPP sledgehammer.

It becomes very clear that this question, as the Premier says, "If ... unchecked, we're going to face a huge economic crisis"—I started to look around at some of the other crises that she seems to have little interest in, and one that struck me as very important is that which the Ontario Auditor General has indicated to us most recently. She's very concerned about the growing debt: "Although the government projects that it will not have a deficit in 2017-18, until then, it will still need to borrow

to finance annual deficits, fund infrastructure investments and refinance existing debt. 'We project that by the time the annual deficit is eliminated in 2017-18, the net debt will stand at about \$325 billion. That is about \$23,000 for every single resident of Ontario.'"

Ultimately, the question of how much debt the province should carry and the strategies the government could use to pay it down is one of government policy. However, this should not prevent the government from providing information that promotes further understanding of the issue and clarifies the choice it is making, or will make, to address the province's growing debt burden.

I want to come back to that \$23,000 that each of us owes in public debt and make sure that people understand that when we're talking about needing a pension so everyone has money to pass around and buy and sell with, they are restricted by that \$23,000 debt that they have to pay. We know that it's crowding out other spending. We know that just the interest on the debt is the third-largest item, after health and education, that this government has to deal with.

The other thing that I found interesting: I looked around, and now today when you go to see your doctor—the timer is there because there's a crisis developing in that field. The nurses have agreed to come back and go to arbitration, so they at least have come in from the cold. But they are still in the cold as far as any kind of final disposition of their circumstances.

We can look at the crisis in education, in funding for schools and the buildings, and all of the turmoil that that is creating around the province, and it seems strange that the Premier would choose this particular idea as an economic crisis and one that she is concerned about developing into a full-blown economic crisis. I'd like to know when she decides that her finances in this province demonstrate a full-blown economic crisis. When is she going to look at that? When is she going to look seriously at the impediments to making a profit in this province? When is she going to look at the cost that government regulation, legislation, red tape and burdens that have been piled on and piled on and piled on the private sector businesses in this province? Because they're the ones who are going to be looking at taking that 1.9% off the paycheck of their employees and out of their own pocket.

I have difficulty following the logic here—why this particular issue, which many agree is not an issue. I think it's a bit like being told by someone, "You don't look well. Are you okay?" Eventually you begin to have self-doubt: "Did I save enough money? Am I ready for retirement? Can I do this?" That's what has happened, and now, for the purposes of the Premier, it's going to look like a huge economic crisis.

I would argue that there are many other, much more pressing, issues. If we are looking at the private sector, who is basically the funder for this Bill 56, to provide the money for this, I think we need to look at the private sector and look at what problems they are facing today and that they're looking at the fact that they may not be able

to provide jobs. The cost of energy and the cost of competition with others in other jurisdictions are certainly putting a great deal of pressure on them. Now they find out that this would be mandatory—mandatory unless you have a comparable pension. That's a topic unto itself, but what I wanted to mention is the people whom this bill does not capture.

First of all, the people who have defined benefit pensions—that would include all of the public service and many large businesses. But there's a whole group of people that have private provided pension plans. The government has, only so far, said that it will consider “comparable.” I have a vision of “comparable” taking years to decide because there are so many things that remain unanswered about how this would flow, when it would be agreed on that it was a comparable pension—are companies going to give up the pensions they've been providing? What obligations would they have to their employees? It just sounds like a legal feast while people try to figure out what it means for them and what is the best interest of their employees and, quite frankly, what they can afford.

Just to give you one example of this, a friend of a friend told me about the fact that in their employment they have 9% provided by the employer fully. They don't make any contributions to their defined contribution pension plan. So obviously there are going to be ones that are more generous than others. So the inequities in the manner in which this is going to be dealt with create all kinds of scenarios and nightmares of how you would end up with something that was fair and reasonable, whether you were comparable or not.

0950

I mentioned that the people who have the defined benefit are not part of this. The people in the public sector are not part of this conversation. So all of the money for this pension plan comes from the relatively small and, I'm afraid, shrinking position of the private sector. The businesses certainly look at this as being a draconian way of looking at their business situation and how they might survive this.

For those people who want to quibble about whether it's a tax or not, just be clear: It's a deduction. It comes out of your pocket. Anything that goes to the government in that kind of mandatory way, I think most people lump together as a tax.

The other group that is left out, of course, of this conversation are the people who are already retired and the people then who have no job. I think it's really important to remind people that there are 600,000 people in this province who have no job. That means they aren't eligible for a pension. The stats that the various groups have done—which I will get to later—about the layoffs that people will have to endure mean they're not in the pension conversation. As job losses come as a result of higher tax and higher deductions, then those people have no pension. When you're looking at it as a zero-sum game, obviously that's not the case.

One of the things that this government seems to forget or fail to appreciate is the fact that it's only when busi-

ness makes a profit that they are able to pay taxes. When they look at the cost of doing business continually rising all the time, this pension scheme is certainly not something that they, as a group, in the small/medium area particularly, can see their way to being able to do without doing one of two things: You either cut staff or you raise the price of goods. And if you raise the price of goods, you run the risk of pricing yourself out of the market.

The important thing here really should be what impact this is having and if it has, in fact, an impact that will hurt the very people it is designed to support. I don't think that enough care has been taken in the consultation to be able to demonstrate that in fact it wouldn't be hurting people who would theoretically benefit from this pension.

I would say that one job lost is one too many. You have just destroyed the value of doing this if it has the impact of layoffs. People have examined these stats. We've looked at the kind of potential—and job loss is very much a part of the conversation, and so I think that just on the basis of eliminating someone from the ability is too much.

The issue of “comparable” is a black hole. I think it will be a very difficult thing to try to come out with a fair process. I mentioned the fact that the people with no jobs obviously are the ones out of the system. People who are retired are out of the system. People who have defined benefits are out of the system.

But the people then who are employed, aged 18 to 70—I thought it was very interesting that we're now covering from age 18 to 70 to be eligible to make contributions

if they were working. So when we look at that issue, obviously there's a great deal of concern about the way in which this is actually going to be done, because when people see themselves as either the employer or the employee, they naturally have questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me for just a moment. I would ask the gentlemen in the members' gallery—we do appreciate the fact that you're here to observe, but I must ask and must insist that there be no discussions up there, so that we can allow for fair and equal debate on both sides. I appreciate your being here this morning, but I would appreciate your cooperation as well. Thank you very much.

Back to the member from York-Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: So when the two groups, then, are looking at this, they naturally have questions: When must I start submitting my contribution? When would I get the first cheque? How does this work for me? When would I retire? When would I receive the cheques?—various questions. So there's a great deal of concern about the actual way in which this would work.

The bill is also silent on groups of people who obviously want to know—it's silent on the fate of part-time workers, students, and specialized groups such as the agricultural workforce. They obviously have very different kinds of work settings in many cases than other businesses, and so these are groups that have some interest in this.

I mentioned the questions: When do I begin contributing? When do I receive pension benefits? What happens if I'm laid off? What happens if I change employers? These are all natural questions that would come. The only thing I could find that might help them—at least designed, I guess, to help them—is on the ministry's own website. If you haven't been there, you should make a point of going. There's a chart there that says, "See how much Barbara, Bonnie and Bernice would get from the ORPP"—the Ontario Registered Pension Plan—"if they contribute for about 40 years." I'll repeat that: for 40 years.

So three people are shown here. One earns \$45,000, another earns \$70,000 and the third one earns \$90,000. Well, the contribution on the \$45,000-a-year salary is \$2.16 a day, and that's matched by the employer. The contribution of someone with a \$70,000 salary is \$3.46 a day, again matched. The \$90,000 salary contributes \$4.50 per day, so we're looking at \$9 a day contributed.

The point I want to make here is the fact that this shows if they contribute for 40 years. So while we're talking about the bill, I think it's important to realize that this is what the ministry is saying, and they are looking it as a 40-year term. That's not uncommon, by the way, for people to look at the maturity of a pension to be about 40 years, but it doesn't give constituents of mine much comfort seeing something like this, because they've heard the minister say that they are going to be accepting payments starting on January 1, 2017. So with that as the only real date given, and a chart on the ministry's website that says, "You've got to contribute for 40 years before this would be what would you get," I think it should serve as a sobering influence on people who see this as an opportunity that will come by them very quickly.

1000

I also thought about \$4.50 a day. I don't know about you, but that somehow had a ring to it; that used to be a lunch. So the idea of \$9 a day—oh, and what will the \$9 a day give you? It will give you, after the 40 years, \$12,815 a year. I think that's a really good chart to have a look at to get a sense of what some of all of this means.

I touched on the issue of comparable, and I want to come back to it for a moment because it is so important to be able to appreciate—how are you going to measure this? We have no idea how the government is going to measure this. At one point it was floated out that they were going to only look at defined benefit contributions as a comparable pension. Then, that seemed to sort of fade away and there wasn't the same reference made to it. But I think it's really important to give some kind of reassurance to those people, both employed and employers, of the safety of a private plan. People have been doing this on their own for years and they may have a level of satisfaction and they certainly have a lot of money already invested. What happens to that if it's deemed not comparable? There's clearly a cost involved in making all these changes, if they were to be made, and a cost involved to wind up a plan, never mind whether that windup is fair.

I visualize a great deal of red tape going on in this and possibly some sort of tribunal to decide fairness about a pension or whether it's comparable, and a huge amount of effort made, and therefore cost, to be able to move already existing pensions into conformity or wind them up. Any of those things requires time, expertise and cost. I think that people are well to be skeptical of that.

The other thing that nobody has talked about is the fact that Toronto is the financial centre. All of the existing plans are being currently looked after by members of that Toronto financial centre. I don't think that I've seen any analysis or any look—I think because it's a bit premature, but it nevertheless begs to happen—that those institutions that have currently functioning pension plans that they provide for their clients—what happens there? What happens if they are deemed non-comparable? Do we see an unravelling of the financial business community in this city because the government has chosen to interfere and make decisions for us? I think that there's a real concern about that issue and the financial centre, the impact that it would have.

The last thing that I think I have time for is to touch on the issue of enabling legislation. Bill 56 is enabling legislation. The associate minister made reference to the fact that there had to be certain privacy laws that had to be adjusted in order to allow the ministry—I assume it would be the Ministry of Finance. So it all has to be general comments and enabling legislation.

I think it's really important for people to understand what that means. If you were to read Bill 56, you would see that there is very little—almost no—detail in it at all, in terms of the way in which it works. In defence, the ministry says, "We went out and consulted on those issues." But the problem is those things that are left to regulations. Regulations are not a public process. The people who are invited are invited by the ministry to come and lend a hand to the details. One of the problems with that means that the kinds of questions that I have raised on behalf of people who are interested in this—people who want to know, "When does my cheque come? How long do I have to pay in? What happens if I move? What happens if I get laid off?"; all those kinds of normal questions that people would have—none of those are dealt with in Bill 56. There is nothing there to give anyone any sense of where we're going with this in the details. No one is able to read that bill and say, "Oh, my circumstances would be included in the comparable," or, "My circumstances would not." There's nothing to give anybody any confidence, because of the fact that this is enabling legislation.

What that means is that, once again, we're left in the dark until those regulations have been made. At that point, they get posted, but it's the stroke of the cabinet pen that determines what those regulations look like.

I think it's really important for people to understand that what I'm suggesting here today is, first of all, when the Premier said, "People are not saving enough for retirement, and if we let this go unchecked, we're going to face a huge economic crisis," this is a crisis that she

has chosen. This is not one of the many—I think three police investigations might hit that list too. It has nothing to do with the kind of severity of the crisis that the Auditor General has pointed out. It has nothing to do with the severity of what we're watching outside, that doctors and nurses and educators particularly, just to name three, are looking at a crisis in their own circumstances.

We are talking about a bill that provides us with no detail of how it's going to impact.

One of the fundamental reasons for people being elected to the Legislature is to be able to be a conduit both ways between the electorate and the legislators. What we find here is that this is a murky kind of situation that we're in. All that the businesses know, and all that we know, is that the private sector is on the hook. It is the businesses that are the ones that actually create wealth in this province and are the ones that are expected to dig deeper and shell out the money. That's all they know at this point. That is the plan.

I think it's reasonable for people to think that that's not good enough. It's not good enough when people like Jack Mintz say that this is a sledgehammer when we need a scalpel.

People aren't denying that there aren't some people that have not saved for circumstances. That's not the issue. That's not the bill before us. The bill before us will in fact, I believe, damage those it purports to want to help. When one person is laid off because of this shift in the financial responsibilities of an employer to provide for all employees and he can't do that, that one person is a demonstration of the fallacy that lies at the basis of this bill.

I want to finish with where I will begin the next time I have the opportunity, and that's a quote that is the give-away to explain this whole process that we're engaged in. It's a quote from the 2014 budget, and it's important to end on this note because it's where I will begin next time:

“By unlocking value from its assets and encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit. Our strong alternative financing and procurement model, run by Infrastructure Ontario, will allow for the efficient deployment of this capital in job-creating projects.”

Well, that's really why we need to get that 1.9% out of everybody's pocket. That's where the money really is designed to go.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm close to time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from York-Simcoe for your debate this morning. You will be allowed to continue with your debate at the appointed time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Seeing as how it is now almost 10:15, this Legislature stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR SUDBURY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Sudbury.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I have a letter that reads as follows: “A writ of election dated the 7th day of January, 2015, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Ellen Kerr, returning officer for the electoral district of Sudbury, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Sudbury in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Joe Cimino, who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Sudbury, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Sudbury on the 5th day of February, 2015, Glenn Thibeault has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 13th day of February, 2015, which is now lodged of record in my office.”

It is signed by Greg Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer, and dated, in Toronto, February 16, 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier, government House leader.

Mr. Thibeault was escorted into the House by Ms. Wynne and Mr. Naqvi.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have the honour to present to you and to the House Glenn Thibeault, member-elect for the electoral district of Sudbury, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: It's delightful to introduce Gwen Davis, née Sutcliffe. She's a former Hepworthian and she actually babysat me as a child. I trust she never thought she'd ever see me here. Welcome.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to welcome a contingent of corrections officers. I have Randy Simpraga and Carsten Schiller from Local 135, which is down my way in Windsor. I'd also like to welcome James Nowe, Raffaella Tassone and Greg Arnold as well.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, it's my great pleasure today to welcome Adrian and Draupadi Quinn, along with Katelyn Crane, Brooke Murphy and Tamara Elstub. They're from Kaley's Acres. Kaley's Acres was recently awarded the Premier's Award for agricultural innovation. We are excited to have them back here today visiting us, as they bring bags of kale chips for all members of this House to enjoy. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It gives me great pleasure to introduce, in the members' gallery this morning, Ruth Howe.

Ruth is a long-time friend. I'm glad to have you here in the members' gallery at Queen's Park. Welcome.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Monte Vieselmeyer, who is the co-chair of the management-employee relations committee with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and all the correctional, probation and parole officers in the House today. Thank you very much for your service.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure for me to introduce, on behalf of my colleague Christine Elliott, Chris Eaton. Chris Eaton is the dad of Riley, who is a page serving here. Welcome.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd ask the House to join me in welcoming members from OPSEU here in the House. We have Kulvir Saini, Gordon Cobb, Pete Wright, Len Elliott and Monte Vieselmeyer. Thank you so much for being here.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to welcome Smokey Thomas and others from OPSEU here today. Thank you for all the work you do every single day.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to introduce Allison St-Jean from my community office in Ottawa. She's in the east gallery along with Elise Roiron, who is my legislative assistant here at Queen's Park. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It gives me great pleasure to welcome members of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Black, African and Caribbean Network who are joining us here in the Legislature. Joining us is Shannon Ryan, Valerie Pierre-Pierre and Wangari Tharao.

This group is a national network of organizations and individuals dedicated to responding to issues related to HIV and AIDS in Canada's African, Caribbean and black community. I'd like to welcome them to the Legislature. They were here on February 7, when they had an awareness day. I just want to say thank you for being here today, and thank you for your hard work on behalf of all Ontarians.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to introduce Dr. Kelly Hoogeveen, who is here. She is the mother of new page Niko Hoogeveen, who is from Alcona Glen in Barrie.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: May I just begin by congratulating the new member for Sudbury, Mr. Thibeault? Welcome to the House.

Interjection: Where is he?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Where is he?

Interjection: He's over here.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Oh, you're over there. I can't see that far, Glenn. Anyway, welcome.

My question is to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Sudbury by-election was not without a dark cloud cast over the electoral process. Caught on tape is a discussion between your deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara,

saying to your former candidate, Andrew Olivier, "We should have the broader discussion about what it is that you'd be most interested in doing, and then decide what shape that could take that would fulfill that is, what I'm getting at, whether it's a full-time or a part-time job in a const office, whether it is appointments, supports, or commissions, whether it is also going on the" executive—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Jim Wilson:—"we would just need to better understand what it is that you most want to do."

Premier, that sure sounds like a bribe to me, and the OPP obviously—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'd ask the member to withdraw, and then your time is up, so please withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, let me—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You have the right to remain silent.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I will make it clear now: We will have order.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I just want to congratulate the new member for Sudbury and to welcome him to our caucus.

He ran a positive campaign in Sudbury. He campaigned on the issues, and he has been and will be a strong voice for the people of Sudbury. We are thrilled to have him here at Queen's Park.

1040

As I have said repeatedly—I have said in public, I have said to Elections Ontario and I will continue to say—I had, in my role as the leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, made a decision to appoint a candidate in Sudbury, and at the same time—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will withdraw.

Mr. Bill Walker: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You have a 10-second wrap-up.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: At the same time, I worked very hard to try to keep the past candidate involved in the party. That's what those conversations were about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: Premier, your spokesperson has said that "any suggestion that anything was offered in exchange for any action is false," yet on the tape your deputy chief of staff clearly says that the new member for Sudbury would actually be very open—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): President of Treasury Board, come to order.

Mr. Jim Wilson: —to a job in his office as a constituency assistant. That is offering him a government job.

Pat Sorbara also said: “Let’s look at other ways ... you can be involved,” and that some of these other ways would allow Mr. Olivier to “meet with the Premier regularly.”

Premier, honourable ministers in the past have voluntarily stepped down for actions of their staff because it’s the right thing to do. Will you at the very least demand that your deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, step aside?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite well knows, the duties of the deputy chief of staff in my office are separate from the ongoing investigation. They’re separate from any role in a by-election, so it is not necessary.

The member opposite also knows that, at the request of the opposition parties, there is an investigation going on. The authorities are examining any allegations, and those investigations are independent of the work that is going on in my office.

As I have said repeatedly, any suggestion that anything was offered in exchange for any action is false, Mr. Speaker. I had made a decision that I was going to appoint a candidate in the—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): President of the Treasury Board, come to order—second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The context in which those conversation took place was the context in which I had decided to appoint a candidate. Any of those conversations were about keeping a young man involved in the party, and quite frankly, I think it’s the responsibility of a leader to try to keep past candidates involved in the party. I think that’s part of our responsibility.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier. I think the Premier misses the point of the law in this case, and the law is clear. This young man wanted to stay involved in the party, he had indicated that he was going to run in the nomination process again, so he wasn’t, as you said in your news conference this morning, a “past candidate” or a “failed candidate,” and therefore you could offer him a job. He was actively in the candidate process, and you intervened. The allegations are—and they’re pretty clear on the tape to me—that a job offer was made or other arrangements could be made, and that may very well be found to be against the Criminal Code and against the Election Act.

Do you really want someone in your office—your deputy chief of staff—who has criminal-wrongdoing

allegations hanging over her? How can that person possibly serve the people of Ontario when she’s so tainted in terms of reputation and it’s hurting your reputation and it’s hurting the reputation of the Premier of the province of Ontario and the office that you hold?

Will you do the right thing, the honourable thing, and get rid of this—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The number of leaps that the member opposite makes in that question is quite remarkable.

I made a decision, which is my prerogative as the leader of the party, to appoint a candidate. That decision was made. There was not a nomination race because I made a decision that we were going to appoint a candidate. I decided, Mr. Speaker, that having Glenn Thibeault as the candidate for us in Sudbury was the right decision. I made that decision and then we tried to keep a young man, who had been a past candidate, involved in the party. That’s what happened, Mr. Speaker. That’s what those conversations were about.

Quite frankly, I had decided that I did not want that young man to find out that I had appointed a candidate in the newspaper. That’s why I had a conversation with him. I wanted him to know that we wanted him to be involved, and I think it’s the responsibility of all leaders to keep people involved in the party.

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. New question.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Last week was the two-year anniversary of you becoming Premier, but it was also two years ago last week that the gas plant files were deleted. The OPP has since recovered thousands of gas plant emails deleted by Liberal staffers. Many of those staffers testified in the justice committee hearings and, like you, took an oath to solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Those staffers responded to the many freedom-of-information requests on the gas plant scandal. With the knowledge and confidence that all their files were deleted, they boldly swore, “I have no responsive emails.”

Premier, will you launch an investigation into which of your staffers lied under oath?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We’re going to start tiptoeing around it—I’m going to make a ruling: Withdraw, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the government House leader is going to want to speak to the process, but I will just say that the member opposite knows that hundreds of thousands of documents went before the

committee. There were dozens of witnesses who spoke to the issues. We opened up the process.

Two years ago, when I came into office, in this office, I said we were going to open up the process and we were going to make sure that the committee was able to ask the questions that they needed to ask and bring the witnesses on any issue that they deemed to be relevant. And that happened.

I'm encouraged that the report has been written. I understand that it will be released shortly. That's a good thing. I think that it was very important that the committee was allowed to do its work, and it was allowed to do its work because we opened up the process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again to the Premier: One freedom-of-information request asks nine senior staff for all their files related to the gas plant scandal from January 1 to October 1, 2012. Five Liberal staffers wrote back, "I have no records," but the OPP then recovered emails from Laura Miller and others relating to the gas plants within that time period. Laura also told the justice committee under oath that she had no documents.

Premier, when people file a freedom-of-information request, when MPPs ask questions in committee, they need to know the answers are truthful. Laura Miller, now executive director of the BC Liberals, hasn't spoken to the OPP. When are you going to show some moral leadership, call Premier Christy Clark, and demand she send Laura Miller back to Ontario to co-operate with the OPP?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Let me first of all start by welcoming the new member of provincial Parliament from Sudbury to this House. I look forward to working with him.

Speaker, as the member opposite noted himself, there is an active OPP investigation going on in the matter. I think we should let the Ontario Provincial Police do its work when it comes to any allegations there may be.

What we know is that this Premier, when she became the leader of this government, immediately opened up the process and ensured that hundreds of thousands of new documents were submitted to the committee. Speaker, the justice committee, as you know, has been looking into the matter for the last two years. They have heard from about 93 witnesses, and they have had ample information to consider in order to ensure that they can provide guidance to the government when it comes to major issues that the committee was looking at.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

1050

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, let's go back to that freedom-of-information request where five Liberal staffers wrote back, "I have no records."

According to an affidavit, in her role as special assistant to the Premier, Beckie Codd-Downey was to "identify individuals who may have responsive records." In December, the OPP recovered gas plant emails seized on computers from the Premier's office. Much to our shock and surprise, here's an email from the very same Beckie Codd-Downey. It reads, "Talked to Dave. Will delete my" emails. Talk about the fox running the hen-house. She was in charge of identifying the very individuals who may have gas plant emails but didn't put herself on the list.

Premier, why is Beckie Codd-Downey employed in your government today?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in my previous response, this Premier and this government have opened up government significantly. We have implemented significant record-keeping reforms such as mandatory staff training.

In addition, Speaker, we have passed a very broad accountability act which implements key recommendations from the privacy commissioner, such as ensuring the preservation of records and prohibiting the wilful destruction of records with the intent to deny our right of access to records, and introducing a new offence with a fine of up to \$5,000 for the wilful destruction of records.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North, please withdraw.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I withdraw.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Again? I withdraw. Is that okay?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's try it without the editorial.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, these are very important changes that this government has undertaken. The former Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ann Cavoukian, has credited our government for improving record-keeping across government.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Ontario families are looking for the government to make life a little bit easier, but instead of dealing with people's problems and helping families, this Premier seems very busy with her problems, whether it's three police investigations or putting her political interests first. Meanwhile, moms, dads, teachers and community leaders are worried because the Liberals are closing their neighbourhood schools. Once these schools are closed, Speaker, they are gone for good.

Will the Premier put her own interests and the interests of the Liberal Party on hold, pay attention to what

matters to people, and stop allowing schools to be closed and sold off?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question from the leader of the third party. I will answer the issue around the school consolidations and closures, but I wanted to speak to the work that we've been doing over the last two years, because she referenced helping people in the province, and I just want to go over some of the things that we have done.

We've extended our investment in affordable housing by \$801 million. We've increased the minimum wage. We've increased legal aid. We've increased the Ontario Child Benefit by \$100. As of this past September, all four- and five-year-olds in Ontario have access to full-day kindergarten. We've strengthened community and developmental services. We've helped 8,000 families who didn't have help before and who have help now.

Mr. Speaker, those are all initiatives that we have taken in order to help people in this province, in order to help people in their day-to-day lives and help the families of this province. That's the work that we've been doing over the last two years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's my list of the Liberal record. Across Ontario, nursing positions are being eliminated, and for over two weeks, 3,000 home care nurses were walking the picket line in this province. The Liberals have cut hospital budgets, Speaker. Ontarians face longer wait times for home care and for long-term care. The Liberals have attacked the women and men who provide health care services in this province.

The treasury is full, however, when it comes to sweetheart P3 deals or paying for scandals like Ornge and the gas plants. When a Liberal needs a helping hand, the good times keep on rolling, Speaker, but when it comes to health care, the Liberals say that our cupboards are bare here in this province.

Will the Premier start funding health care properly and end the Liberal waste and corruption that plagues this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the question seems to have shifted, but let me just take this moment to say that I'm very pleased that the negotiations were completed and that there's an agreement with the CCAC nurses. That's a good thing.

I actually would have thought that the leader of the third party would respect and honour the collective bargaining process. The fact is, when there is a disagreement—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sergeant-at-Arms.

Interruption.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was actually talking, Mr. Speaker, about a collective bargaining process that reached a successful conclusion, and we have agree-

ments. I hope that we can come to an agreement with OPSEU. That is absolutely our intention: to bargain at the table and to come to an agreement.

On the question of health care: The funding for health care continues to increase year over year in this province. We are making more investments in health care. We will continue to do that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps this Premier is not aware, but going into arbitration is not the successful conclusion of a collective bargaining process.

But do you know what, Speaker? The OPSEU members who were out on the front lawns of Queen's Park this morning remind us about how important our public services are to the people of this province. People want to see—and expect—their corrections facilities being safely and properly staffed, day in and day out. They want to know that their ODSP and social services cheques that are supposed to be going out to the most vulnerable people in Ontario are actually going out and reaching those folks. They want to know that troubled children are getting the help and protection that they deserve.

But rather than investing in services and the people who deliver those services, the Premier is gutting services and ordering up pink slips for the people who deliver those services. Don Drummond said the Liberals were going to fire 100,000 people. Will the Premier stop this attack now and—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I would just say to the leader of the third party that she knows full well that when both parties agree to arbitration, that's part of the process. That's what has happened.

I want to pick another point out of that grab bag of things that the leader of the third party talked about: talking about investing in the people who deliver the services in this province. I think it's actually shameful that the leader of the third party was not supportive of a budget that invested more in personal support workers and gave them an increase, one that they have not had for many years, and that invested in early childhood educators and developmental support workers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Increasing the salaries of those people who do the essential and vital work of looking after some of the most vulnerable people in this province is absolutely a hallmark of our budget. The leader of the third party didn't support it, and doesn't even acknowledge that those people are getting support because of the changes that we have made.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I'd like to think that people actually get into politics because they believe in public services. I want to

believe, in fact, that integrity and respect once mattered to the Premier of this province. Members of every party owe it to Ontarians to restore their faith in government. It's time to start undoing the damage done by the Premier and her party by showing that integrity and trust, in fact, do matter.

1100

Will the Premier show leadership so that we can begin the important task of rebuilding confidence and trust in our political institutions and government by putting Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed on leave?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear about the actions that I took in Sudbury, and I will continue to be clear. I made it clear that I made a decision as the leader of the party to appoint a candidate. Having done that, there were conversations with the past candidate about keeping him involved in the party. That's the decision that I made. Those are the actions that we took.

I had made a decision that Glenn Thibeault was the candidate that we wanted as our candidate in Sudbury. He will be a wonderful MPP for the people of Sudbury. The conversations with the former candidate were about keeping him involved because I had decided that I was going to appoint a candidate to run in the by-election.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In its investigation into bribery in the Sudbury by-election, the OPP says that "reference to the Premier's authority threatens the appearance of the government's integrity"—not just the Premier's personal integrity, not just the integrity of the Premier's office, not just the caucus or the cabinet or the candidate for that matter; the government's integrity. And yet the Premier insists on protecting Liberal insiders Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed.

According to Mr. Lougheed, the Premier was behind the offer to Mr. Olivier, so the Premier can also direct him and Pat Sorbara to step aside until this investigation is complete. Will the Premier actually show some leadership and begin to rebuild the public trust by doing the right thing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said repeatedly, any suggestion that anything was offered in exchange for any action is false. There was no specific offer. There was no commitment. There was a discussion about how this young man might want to stay involved.

I have to say, the people of Sudbury had all this information when they went to the polls. They made a decision. They have sent Glenn Thibeault to Queen's Park, and I think we need to respect and honour the decision of the people of Sudbury.

What I have to do as the leader and what I have to do as a politician is answer questions. Of course, the opposition have asked for an investigation; that investigation is happening. It's taking place. We will co-operate. My responsibility is to answer honestly. That is what I have done, and I will continue to do so.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A few short months ago, the Premier apologized for scandals and cover-ups. "It won't happen again," she claimed during the election campaign. "I learned my lesson," she said. But all the Premier learned was to deny, obstruct and ignore the truth. She learned to protect Liberal insiders at all costs and that nobody is ever held to account under her watch.

Now she's at the centre of a bribery scandal. The OPP are investigating. Elections Ontario is investigating. There is a culture of arrogance and entitlement in the Premier's office and the Premier is refusing to clean it up. This does not pass the smell test.

Ontarians deserve better. I certainly believe that. My caucus believes that. I believe the other opposition party believes that. Does the Premier agree that Ontarians deserve better?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think—I know—that Ontarians deserve to understand exactly what happened, and what I have said is exactly what happened. I made a decision as the leader, which is my prerogative as the leader of the party, to decide on appointing a candidate. I made that decision. I didn't want the past candidate to learn from the newspaper that I had made that decision. So yes, I had a conversation with the past candidate, and those conversations were about how that young person might want to stay involved in the party.

Quite frankly, I would expect that the leaders of the opposition parties, of any party, would want to keep someone involved if they had been involved as a candidate in the party. I think that's a responsibility that we have as leaders. That's what I did. We have a new member for the riding of Sudbury. The people of Sudbury made that decision, and I think we need to respect the decision of the constituents of Sudbury.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Premier. As you're well aware, Premier, your Sudbury Liberal king-maker, Mr. Gerry Lougheed, Jr., told your former candidate, Andrew Olivier, that "I come to you, on behalf of the Premier..." and that "They," meaning your office, "would like to present"—in this case Mr. Olivier—"options in terms of appointments, jobs, whatever."

I think, Premier, that this backroom political dealing seems a little dubious—so dubious, as a matter of fact, that the OPP is investigating Mr. Lougheed, a man who happens to be your appointee to the Greater Sudbury Police Services Board. I just don't see how he can lead a police services board while being under investigation for bribery by the OPP.

Premier, will you remove Mr. Lougheed from the board until the OPP finishes their investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, police services boards are responsible for the provision of adequate and effective policing services in the municipality. I understand that the Sudbury police services board addressed this issue last week. They took a vote, Mr. Speaker, and they voted to

have Mr. Lougheed remain in place. They made that decision. We don't direct the police services board. They made that decision. They want to keep him involved.

To the preamble in the member's question, I talked about wanting to keep this young man involved. There are many ways that people can stay involved, and for all of those things, there would be an application process. There would have been a process through which he would have had to go to get any of those positions. Those were options; those were suggestions about how that young person might want to stay involved. As I've said, I think those are conversations that I would hope leaders would have with past candidates on all sides of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Premier, Mr. Lougheed informed Mr. Olivier that he would tell the Premier to call him. He coached Mr. Olivier to ask—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: —and I quote, “... ‘what are you giving me, for me to step down, that is worthwhile?’ ... And I think that's the point, only you and [the Premier] can have that conversation.” Those are Mr. Lougheed's comments to Mr. Olivier.

Well, Premier, either you were aware of specific job offers or Mr. Lougheed was making unacceptable claims on your behalf. This is a possible breach of the code of conduct that all members of the police services boards are subject to, Premier, and I've asked the Ontario Civilian Police Commission to investigate.

So, Premier, were you aware of a job offer? Will you remove Mr. Lougheed from the board until the OPP finishes their investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to restate what the Premier said. I think it's a very important point, that police services boards are responsible for the provision of adequate and effective police services within their municipality. Among their duties, police services boards generally determine the objectives and priorities with respect to police services within their community and establish policies for the effective management of those police services.

Speaker, the Police Services Act does not give the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services any authority to remove a board member, as all board members of a police services board are appointed by the province or municipal council and they're subject to a code of conduct which is in the regulations under the Police Services Act.

In this particular instance, as we know, the police services board looked at this matter, they considered this matter, and they voted to keep the chair in his position. If there is a breach, OCPC has to investigate that matter, Speaker.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the Premier: Did the Premier personally make the decision to offer a bribe to Andrew Olivier not to run for office?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'll ask the member to withdraw.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, it's in the Election Act—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do you want to restate the question?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, let me try this way: Section 96.1 of the Election Act has a section entitled Bribery. It deals with how you're not allowed to do the kinds of things that happened in the last election. So to rephrase my question, utilizing the language of the Election Act, under section 96.1, Bribery, did the Premier personally make the decision to offer that bribe to Mr. Olivier or not?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Whether it says that in the act—you can't use that language in this House and you can't accuse a member of bribery. That's the ruling, and it will not happen again. Withdraw.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, I withdraw—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No. Let's get this clear: Withdraw, and then I'll explain to you what I'd like to offer you. Just do the withdrawal, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I did. Again?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry, I'll do it again: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member to rephrase the question in a way that does not use the language that is not acceptable in the House.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I don't know. We debated this legislation in the House. It was a word used in the legislation, but I'll try. Did the Premier personally make the decision to offer a “blank” to Andrew Olivier not to run for office?

Interjections.

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

Let me apologize if I'm not being clear enough. First of all, you cannot say anything indirectly that is meaning the direct word. Second of all, it's not the word or the quoting of the law; it's the accusation of a member being part of that or saying that. So I'm going to ask the member—if one more time you attempt to say the word again, I'll just pass.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, I will try again. I used the word “blank,” so I'm going to try another word. Did the Premier personally make the decision to offer something to Mr. Olivier that was contrary to section 96.1 of the Election Act?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well said.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The decision that I made, the personal decision I made—

Interruption.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's just my bracelet—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know. It just fell off.

The decision I made was to appoint a candidate in Sudbury. I made that decision, so there was no nomination race; there was no other process. The process was that I decided to appoint Glenn Thibeault as our candidate. Then I decided that I would want to keep the former candidate involved, and so that's what the conversation was about. It wasn't about anything other than keeping him involved as a part of the Liberal team, as a part of the family, because he had been our candidate, and I knew it was a difficult process when the leader makes a decision to appoint. But I had made that decision, and that was the personal decision that I made in this process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, that's pretty contrary to the facts, Madam Premier. When you look at the recordings and you read the transcripts, it's pretty clear what happened. You made an offer way before he actually—that all that had happened.

Let me ask you this: When did the Premier tell the deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, or the Liberal king-maker, Mr. Lougheed Jr.—and offered them something that was contrary to Section 96.1 of the Election Act, entitled Bribery?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The premise of the question is that the member opposite knows what was going on in my mind at every moment and knows when I made the decision to appoint, and he doesn't know that, Mr. Speaker. What I'm saying is that the decision to appoint—I had already made the decision to appoint. That decision had been made. Glenn Thibeault was the person whom I wanted as our candidate in Sudbury. That decision was made, and the conversations were about keeping the past candidate involved.

That's the truth, Mr. Speaker. I've told Elections Ontario that. I will continue to tell anyone who asks me that that is what happened. That is why we were having those conversations.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I want to thank everyone for the warm welcome.

My question today is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Ontario's mineral sector has a tremendous impact on job creation across the province and is vital to the economy in the north, particularly in my hometown of Sudbury.

Sudbury has a rich history when it comes to mining. The Sudbury basin has been producing ore for over 100 years, and the local economy relies on a healthy mining industry. I'm proud that Ontario remains the top

jurisdiction for exploration and production of minerals in Canada.

Will the minister please inform the House on the status of mining in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: That is a great question. I want to start, of course, by welcoming the member from Sudbury to this Legislature. We are very proud to have him on our team. I know he'll be a very strong voice for the north and for the constituents of the Sudbury riding.

As the member mentioned, Ontario is the leading jurisdiction in Canada for exploration and production of minerals. People need to know that there are currently 43 mines operating in Ontario, and the potential for growth continues to be very significant. There are actually over 30 mineral projects in the advanced stages of exploration right now in the province. The number of direct jobs in the mineral sector: production, 26,000 in 2014, and, in the supply and services sector, another 41,000 jobs.

Our government continues to work hard with the mining sector to create jobs and enhance economic prosperity through responsible development of the province's mineral sector. We know that the member from Sudbury will be a great help in making that happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: The mineral exploration industry is an incredibly important contributor to our provincial economy. I know personally how essential fostering a strong mineral sector is to ensuring that northern Ontario remains on a positive track.

In Sudbury, we have seen the benefits of a diversifying economy from mining to fabrication and processing, and a growing mining supply and service industry. We continue to see the different ways this is spurring innovation across our community, across our province and across our country. I am pleased that the outlook for mine expansion in northern Ontario continues to be a promising one.

I understand that there have been several announcements of new investments in mining in Ontario. Can the minister elaborate on those most recent mining developments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The fact is that 2015 is off to a tremendous start. In January, New Gold moved a step closer to construction of their virtually \$1-billion Rainy River gold project by securing federal and provincial environmental assessment approvals. That's a very exciting project in the Rainy River area.

This month, Centerra Gold, a global mining company, announced that they'd be investing in the province of Ontario. Centerra's \$300-million partnership with Premier Gold Mines will help advance northwestern Ontario's Hardrock gold project in the Greenstone/Geraldton area—great stuff.

But it's not just in the northwest, Speaker. As the member mentioned, the Sudbury area is home to five projects, including KGHM International's Victoria project and Vale's Victor-Capre project, both of which are large nickel-copper-PGM-rich deposits.

Our government is excited by these opportunities. We're going to keep looking forward to it. We're looking

forward to the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference coming up in a week or so in which we'll join you; we hope you'll join us.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, you recently announced that your seamless rollout of SAMS now requires a third-party adviser to tell us what front-line workers have been telling you for months: SAMS is not working. This is all too lame. We know that “adviser” is simply a code word for “consultant.”

Minister, given your government's track record in signing sweetheart deals with consultants and other insiders, will you disclose who this consultant is and exactly how much the taxpayers of Ontario are going to pay for this?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I also would like to congratulate our new member from Sudbury.

I'd like to explain to this House a number of the actions that our government has taken in relation to SAMS since we last sat in December.

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First of all, the initial issues encountered in November involving the accuracy and delivery of benefit payments have been addressed. Overall, SAMS has now processed three successful pay runs for both ODSP and OW monthly payments. This means that SAMS has processed over two million payments to our most vulnerable families.

Because of the various issues that were raised with me, I've spent the last several weeks visiting a number of ODSP and Ontario Works offices across the province, and I've heard first-hand from workers the challenges with SAMS and listened to their experiences during the transition. I've also talked to dozens of mayors and other municipal officials clearly expressing their concerns and the concerns of their staff.

I do want to thank all these hard-working staff for them ensuring our most vulnerable—

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, my question is back to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Your government is saying it hasn't got money for doctors, nurses and affordable housing, but when it comes to hiring consultants, there's never a shortage of money for them.

Minister, you recently poured an additional \$16 million into the SAMS boondoggle to try to save face for your government. This money could have paid for a lot of food, heat and hydro, dental appointments and housing for our most vulnerable citizens.

I ask again, Minister: How much more is it going to cost the taxpayers to cover your incompetence and mismanagement? What is the timeline for the minor glitch to be fixed? Most importantly, when will the

people who are hurting the most as a result of your boondoggle receive the services they so need and much deserve?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Certainly, as a result of my investigations over the last couple of months, I do agree that the implementation of SAMS must be improved. In the coming weeks and months, we will be taking specific actions to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of SAMS.

I have decided that we will select an independent third party adviser who will provide further advice and assistance, evaluate our progress and recommend actions to help us reach our goals. Our municipal partners and staff delivering services to clients will be fully engaged in this review.

We have established a technical working group that now is going to include front-line workers. In fact, members from CUPE have already been part of that working group on a couple of occasions to bring their perspective to the table.

We need to make this system, complicated as it is, simpler and more user-friendly. To this end, we will be requesting the services of a new set of fresh eyes on the issues while we continue to improve SAMS.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. OPP investigator Detective Erin Thomas says, “I believe the words spoken by both Loughheed and Sorbara to Olivier assists me in my belief the Criminal Code offence has been committed.” Loughheed and Sorbara were both speaking on behalf of the Premier. Is the Premier now suggesting that they were acting on their own behalf? Or were they acting on her behalf?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that the people of Ontario actually understand what's going on here. You see, Speaker, the NDP won the riding of Sudbury in the last general election. Five months later, the member resigned.

We ran an excellent candidate, who happened to have been a member of the New Democratic Party before he decided that Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberal Party understood the issues of the north and could drive positive change. A superb candidate with a superb track record chose to run for the Liberal Party.

The NDP, understandably, are not happy that the people of Sudbury rejected their candidate and elected our candidate, and I think it's time that the NDP actually accepted the will of the people of Sudbury, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Ontario should know that in response to a serious question about criminal allegations conducted by this government, the Deputy Premier gave a story unrelated to that question.

New Democrats have asked for the Premier's deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, and for Gerry Loughheed, who

is on the police services board for Sudbury, to step down until this investigation is completed—a very reasonable request. They both claimed they were acting on behalf of the Premier.

Is the Premier suggesting that she had no conversations with Sorbara or Lougheed about Andrew Olivier and the Sudbury by-election?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Premier has addressed this issue, so let's learn a little bit more about the person the people of Sudbury have elected to represent them here.

Throughout his career, Glenn has shown an unwavering commitment to a better, fairer Sudbury. He has fought tirelessly for supports for persons with developmental disabilities and for quality services for families struggling with autism. As a director with the United Way, he led many successful campaigns in support of community development, and as a proud volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters and minor hockey and football leagues, he has helped empower Sudbury youth to achieve their full potential.

Glenn remains focused on building opportunity and prosperity for all members of the great community of Sudbury. Whether advocating for greater retirement security, enhanced consumer protection measures or significant investments in the Ring of Fire, Glenn has put Sudbury and Sudburians front and centre. We welcome his election.

Interjections.

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

BIODIVERSITY

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is for the very enthusiastic Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

But before asking my question, I too want to welcome the new member from Sudbury. It's a rare occasion when the government wins back a seat on a by-election, and I want to thank you, Mr. Thibeault, and the people of Sudbury for the confidence they've shown in you and the party.

My question relates to biodiversity. Ontario's economy, its environment and its cultural identity are intimately connected with biodiversity. We are fortunate in Ontario to benefit from a great variety of species and an abundance of different plants, animals and ecosystems. Biodiversity is in many ways nature's insurance plan. That diversity provides resilience to disturbances like pests, disease, droughts, floods and forest fires. For Ontario families, and families in my riding of Beaches–East York, biodiversity plays an important role in keeping our air clean and our water safe.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry: Will the minister inform the House of what our government is currently doing to strengthen and protect biodiversity here in Ontario?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Let me add my welcome to the member from Sudbury as well. We look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

To the member from Beaches–East York: Thank you very much for the question.

Ontario has the most up-to-date biodiversity strategy in Canada, and we're the first province to update our strategy to be consistent with the targets adopted internationally by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

This year, my ministry will be working with the Ontario Biodiversity Council on two important projects. We will be developing the State of Ontario's Biodiversity report, and in May we will be holding the Ontario Biodiversity Summit.

I've also reintroduced the Invasive Species Act, which, if passed, will make Ontario the only jurisdiction in Canada with stand-alone invasive-species legislation. It will also provide the tools necessary to prevent, detect, rapidly respond to and eradicate invasive species across the province.

My ministry is also undertaking a commitment to plant 50 million trees, including one million trees in urban areas, by 2025, and I'm pleased to report that we've already planted 16 million since 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for his response and for his dedication to biodiversity in our province. I particularly want to commend him for championing the very important Invasive Species Act, Bill 37. We need to be able to rapidly respond to invasive species and prevent their introduction into our ecosystems. I hope that we are able to move this important bill through the House, with the co-operation of our fellows opposite.

My constituents in Beaches–East York recognize that conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity is a shared responsibility, and it's critical that the provinces and territories and the federal government all work together to address these threats to our diverse ecosystems. It's essential that Ontario is working with colleagues in other jurisdictions to develop strategies to protect our common interests. For example, resources like the boreal forest and the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Seaway span across various jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, again through you to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry: What are we doing in this government to engage with our counterparts in other provinces and with the federal government, and how are we advocating for Ontario's interests?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I thank the member from Beaches–East York for this question as well.

Just last week I was in Ottawa, meeting with my colleagues from across the country to discuss the conservation of wildlife and biodiversity. The discussions we had during these meetings were a significant step toward future collaboration on issues related to species at risk and invasive species.

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I was proud to lead the conversations regarding invasive species and advocate for more collaboration between our jurisdictions to address this threat. As a

result, we agreed to develop a federal-provincial-territorial task force to support future efforts to fight invasive species.

Also, last week the federal government announced Canada's 2020 biodiversity targets. I was pleased that my ministry was able to contribute to the development of these Canada-wide targets and will do our part through our biodiversity strategy and government plan to advance these goals.

Working with our partners in other provinces and states, the federal government, municipalities, stakeholders and aboriginal communities—together we will strengthen Ontario's biodiversity, grow our economy and protect our natural heritage.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just a reminder to all members that you use only the title or the riding, and we'll leave off all the explanatory notes of how great members are.

I will defer to the next question to the member from Oxford.

HOUSING SERVICES CORP.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, we've discovered a lot of questionable expenses at the Housing Services Corporation. Just after the Legislature rose for the break, we received FOI documents that show that your provincial appointment received \$72,000 a year in affordable housing money paid to his personal consulting firm, and a \$262,000 payout to the former CEO that you told the media you weren't even aware of.

You claim that HSC has reported to you, but either you haven't read the report or you missed some of the facts. We've been asking you for that report since December and still don't have it.

So Minister, if you actually read the report, what are the problems that are still in there?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the honourable member's concerns. They're concerns that I share. I also appreciate the fact that it was our government that put accountability and transparency regulations in place—

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: —that were missed by the previous government when they set up this corporation. Those enabled us to spot some red flags.

I wrote to the corporation and said it wasn't good enough. They have now agreed to abide by cabinet spending guidelines. The board member who was referenced is no longer a board member, and the HSC has requested of us, voluntarily, that we do a third-party independent audit of their operation and all their subsidiaries—

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Minister, when the waiting lists for affordable housing have increased by almost 40,000 since you were elected, we can't afford money being siphoned off out of the affordable housing envelope.

If you received a report four months ago that contained all these questionable expenses and contracts, why didn't you act then? You claimed there is a review, but you haven't even issued a request for proposals to find someone to conduct that review.

Will you stop burying the facts and ask the provincial auditor to look at the Housing Services Corporation today?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I think the honourable member is pulling an alarm on a fire he and his government set. I'm not sure whether his lament is that his party didn't put the mechanisms in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm not sure his lament is that we actually did put those provisions in place, and I'm not sure that his worry is that we, having discovered some problems, are about the process of correcting those.

The best political advice I ever got was from the late great Sterling Hunt, who said, "Tell the folk what's broke and how you're going to fix it." That's exactly what we're doing with the HSC.

Interjections.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians take the OPP seriously. We take Elections Ontario very seriously. And when they are both investigating bribery allegations that come straight out of the Premier's office, we take those extremely seriously. Why isn't the Premier of this province taking those allegations and those investigations seriously?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I am, and we are, taking them seriously. I've already said many times that I have had a meeting with Elections Ontario. I have talked to Elections Ontario about what went on and I have said exactly what I said in this House, that I had made a decision to appoint a candidate, that we were working to keep the past candidate involved. I take the processes and the investigations very seriously. We will fully co-operate with them, as we have done up to this point.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Premier, police investigations and Elections Ontario investigations obviously are serious matters. They compromise the confidence and the integrity of this government. Leadership means stepping up. It means taking responsibility and taking this investigation seriously, and finding those people who were responsible and holding them accountable. But all the

Premier has said is that she wouldn't do anything differently. Why isn't the Premier showing the needed leadership on this issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to that part of the statement that I've made in this House a number of times now, where I said—and I will say again—that I believe it is the responsibility of the leader of a political party to work to keep people involved, even when there are difficult passages.

I don't know if the member opposite has ever been through a nomination process or has ever lost an election, but I have, and I can tell you that you want to stay involved and you want to know that the party wants to keep you involved. Because it's not a good feeling when you lose an election. It's not a good feeling when the leader appoints a candidate. I understand that. That's the decision I made: to appoint a candidate. I knew that that was going to be difficult for the past candidate and so we wanted to keep him involved.

I hope that the leader of the Conservatives and the leader of the NDP would do the same, that they would work to keep those candidates in Sudbury involved, Mr. Speaker. I hope they—

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

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, last month you announced that there would be significant changes to protect marine mammals held in captivity in Ontario, like whales, dolphins and walrus. The care and protection of marine mammals in captivity is an issue that many Ontarians feel strongly about, and that our government committed to reviewing using the best available science. Minister, your announcement included a plan to bring forward new legislation related to prohibiting any new orca whales and to regulate a higher standard of care for our marine animals.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister provide further details to the House on the forthcoming policy changes and explain what steps you're going to take to stop the abuse of marine animals in captivity in our province?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for the question. Speaker, our government is moving to enact higher standards of care for marine mammals in captivity. We will also be bringing forward legislation that will prohibit the future acquisition and breeding of orcas in Ontario. Stronger protections for marine mammals in captivity are all about making sure that these unique animals receive the best possible treatment and habitat appropriate to their specialized needs. This is something that Ontarians expect and that these animals deserve.

The new standards will be based on the findings and recommendations in a report we commissioned by marine mammals expert Dr. David Rosen of the UBC

Marine Mammal Research Unit. His report, Speaker, emphasized the need for specific standards of care for marine mammals and outlined the areas that those standards should cover. The report is fairly detailed and provides recommendations to the government as to what those standards of care should be. In the supplementary, I look forward to elaborating on those standards.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Many people in Ontario are pleased to know that the government will be bringing forward legislation to prohibit the acquisition of orca whales and will be implementing higher standards for the care of all marine mammals. This is an important step toward ensuring the well-being of these magnificent creatures.

Minister, you have announced that you will be introducing higher standards of care for marine mammals in captivity, but Ontarians need to understand what areas these standards will cover and how they will be developed. Additionally, while introducing new standards is an important part of ensuring the protection of these unique animals, Ontarians need to be assured that the new rules will be effective and that they will work.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister please tell the House how the enhanced standards and protections will be developed and ultimately enforced?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member again. I'm very proud that our province has the strongest animal protection rules in Canada. Based on the scientific foundation presented by Dr. Rosen, we will be developing new standards of care in such areas as light, sound, water quality, enclosure size and more. This work will be informed by a technical advisory group of experts from the scientific enforcement industry and advocacy communities to get advice on the final standards.

Having specific standards of care for marine mammals will help enforcement officials at the OSPCA to ensure that these unique animals are receiving the appropriate care and conditions for their well-being. I have every confidence in the OSPCA to do that. In fact, I'm proud that our government has increased funding for the OSPCA from \$500,000 to \$5.5 million annually to support them in the important work they do.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Earlier today, the member from Nipissing, in a question to the Premier—and I want to point that at no time was an accusation of any kind levelled against a member of this House. We understand we enjoy protection from that as colleagues. But the word, if I'm allowed to use it during a point of order—my colleague used the word “lied” in referring to a possible accusation against, allegations against, members of the staff of the Premier's office. Speaker, you ruled that that word must be withdrawn.

My concern is that staff do not enjoy the same privilege that members do. If you extend that privilege to staff, then how can you not extend it to the entire citizenry that we represent, whether they be accused of criminal offences, whether they be accused of terrorism or whatever? If we cannot use that word when speaking about someone who is not a member of this assembly, then I think you are handcuffing us in a way that, in my opinion, would be wrong.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order, and indeed I accept it as a point of order. It is in line.

Members will know that there's no exhaustive list of words and phrases that are unparliamentary. A comment that is ruled out of order on one occasion may indeed be accepted on another. The decision depends on the context, the tone, and whether or not the comment has caused general disorder.

However, to his specific point, the member is correct. Any attempt to infer directly or indirectly that any honourable member of this House were lied to is always out of order. However, this does not mean that any other use of the term is always in order. As I said, it depends on the context, the tone, and also the reaction. The Speaker has an obligation to preserve order and decorum in the House, and guiding members towards the use of temperate language is one way to do that.

I appreciate any assistance that any member can provide me on that. In this regard, we ask that they engage in a respectful discourse, and I will continue to listen carefully. I accept what the member has indicated to me and I will do my best to ensure that the order of the House is maintained, with the assistance of all members.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order, Speaker: I just wondered, could you update this House on the progress of the Speaker's advisory committee on security?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll give the member a very short answer: The answer is no. However, with clarification, we will be meeting with that task force one more time, and I don't want to inject any comment until the final meetings have taken place.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MEMBER FOR NEPEAN–CARLETON

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is with a great degree of humility that I address the assembly here on our first day back. It's also the first day back since I ended my leadership bid for the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. As a result, I wanted to say thank you to a number of people across the province who have enriched my life and who

have given me an amazing experience and who I wish to say thank you to.

I had a group called #moms4lisa across the province who agree with my stand on choice in child care, and I want to say thank you to Tracy Skelton of Oakville for doing that.

I travelled from Windsor all the way to Cornwall on the 401. I got to go to Sudbury and Thunder Bay and all points in between. For any member of the assembly to have that opportunity is so incredible, to see this great province.

I have a profound appreciation for every member of this assembly, and I want them to know that. I have profound appreciation for the Progressive Conservative Party, its members and the remaining leadership candidates.

I received advice from time to time in this leadership bid from many unlikely faces, many from my own party but also from the NDP House leader, the finance minister and even my former nemesis, Dalton McGuinty.

Ladies and gentlemen of this assembly, I want to say to you today how proud I am, as a member, to be standing here in this assembly for the fourth time in my career. I look forward to completing this mandate and running again in 2018.

Speaker, through you to all members of this assembly, particularly to my own caucus and to members of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, I would like to say thank you.

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

ATTAWAPISKAT HOSPITAL

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm so glad you're staying. Come and give me a hug.

I want to bring to the attention of this House the situation with the hospital in Attawapiskat and to say that, as you know, just before the new year, there was a diesel spill in a brand new fuel-handling system they'd installed at the hospital in order to not have these types of things happen again. Well, the impossible happened and this thing spilled and, unfortunately, it contaminated the crawl space underneath the hospital in Attawapiskat.

Just so that people know, the hospital is fairly new. It's only about 20 years old, and it's a pretty darned good facility, considering where it's at.

The community in Weeneebayko has been working really hard, and the staff have been working extremely hard in order to try to make a good thing out of a bad, to keep on providing health services in Attawapiskat at a time when they don't have a home and are having to intrude on other organizations within the community. I've got to tell you, the community and the chief and council have been very supportive of trying to make this work as best they can. Staff have been working flat out.

We're working on a plan to be able to clean that facility, the crawl space underneath it. I'd like to report to the House that I had a discussion with the minister earlier. He seems more than willing to find a way for-

ward, to deal with some of the bureaucratic stuff that we've got to get out of the way in order to allow money to flow so that we can actually start getting the materials in place during this particular winter season, because if you miss the window, you've got to wait until next year, and that means we would be out of a hospital in Attawapiskat for another 12 months.

I just wanted to report to the House that there is some progress being made. Weeneebayko, the community and the staff are all working hard at making that happen. I look forward to continuing to work with the Minister of Health, because it looks as if we have some movement in that direction.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mr. Yvan Baker: This Saturday, my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Peter Milczyn, and I are going to be hosting the 2015 government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall in Etobicoke. This fair is an annual event, and it offers constituents of our ridings and those from communities across the region a chance to learn more about the services offered both by the provincial government and also by non-profit and for-profit agencies that do good in our respective communities.

These organizations offer many services, services that are not always well known to Ontarians and therefore sometimes underutilized by those who are most in need. I think we can all think of instances where we've helped constituents in our respective communities to find local organizations or elements of the provincial government that can actually serve their specific needs. Bringing the fair to the people of Etobicoke each year helps us to raise awareness about the services offered in our communities and connects our citizens with important resources created specifically for them.

I'm really proud of this event because it attracts over 110 exhibitors from the provincial government, from agencies and from community organizations. What the fair also does is it allows constituents to engage one-on-one with officials, staff and volunteers on issues that impact them. They can get their questions answered, in many cases, on the spot, and this in-person connection helps to bridge the divide between service providers and those relying on those services.

Every year, the fair attracts around 3,000 people, who continue to drop by every year. The fair is going to be taking place this Saturday, February 21, from 11 to 3 p.m. at Cloverdale Mall in Etobicoke. I'd like to invite all the constituents of Etobicoke Centre to join me, and all of you in this House to invite your constituents to join us in Etobicoke, for what promises to be an important event.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY POLICE SERVICE

Mr. Jim McDonell: In mid-January, Cornwall police service received a 911 call from a senior upset about the

food she was receiving. The operator was suspicious about the circumstances and forwarded a request for Cornwall police service to investigate.

Investigating officers found a very sad situation. It turned out to be an elderly couple where the husband was trying to the best of his ability to care for his wife, who was suffering from advanced dementia. The man, too proud to ask for help and faced with increasing financial challenges, could not pay the bills and put food on the table. In fact, he had to sell his wedding ring of 54 years just to put food on the table for the two of them.

Cornwall police officers and civilian support staff went well above and beyond the call of duty that day. They quickly began canvassing amongst themselves and not only collected enough money to buy \$150 worth of groceries, but they also raised the \$130 required to purchase the ring back from the local pawnshop.

This example of generosity and community spirit from some caring residents of my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry not only made the local news, but it became news worldwide.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Cornwall police service D team and the civilian support staff who stepped in to help a very needy couple in my riding. In spite of the very difficult job that they are called upon daily to complete, they still have the dedication and compassion to go the extra mile and help a couple truly in need.

MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today I would like to take a moment to express my serious concern for the state of mental health care in London and the province as a whole. Over the past few weeks, I have met with experts in the field who are affected by mental health issues in the community, and they have identified that we are now facing an incontrovertible mental health care crisis in London.

Last year, my colleague Ms. Sattler and I spoke out in the Legislature regarding the backlog in our emergency rooms and mental health patients waiting for days for a hospital bed.

I hope that this government and other MPPs have seen the various news articles in the past few weeks that revealed that the psychiatric unit at Victoria Hospital in London is dangerously over capacity. In recent weeks, it has come to our community's attention that this overcrowding is causing a serious safety issue for both patients and health care workers.

That safety issue also extends to mental health patients who are living in the community.

In London, we recently suffered the tragic death of a man living in an unregulated group home that provides housing for individuals with mental health issues. These are vulnerable people living in questionable housing with few supports. People are getting hurt, and people are dying.

We need a solution, and we need it now. This government needs to take real, effective action on this issue without further delay.

KINDNESS WEEK SEMAINE DE LA BONTÉ

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the third week in February is Kindness Week in Ontario. We could tell this morning in question period that everyone was aware of that.

I'd like to recognize Ottawa's Kindness Week today. The city-wide initiative encourages community members to choose to be kind and recognizes everyday acts of kindness. Kind Ottawa has become a vibrant movement in our community. Under the leadership of Kindness Week chair Rabbi Reuven Bulka, community leaders and volunteers from across Ottawa employ their resources, experience and enthusiasm to bring Kindness Week to life in Ottawa. Rabbi Bulka was also instrumental in the unanimous passing of Kindness Week in Ontario in this Legislature in 2008.

1510

I'd like to thank my colleagues Mr. Naqvi, MPP Jones and MPP Gélinas for handing out cookies this morning. I'd like to thank Jackie Choquette from the House leader's office, who was kind enough to bake the cookies on the weekend.

Et cette semaine, je vous encourage de participer et de faire des actes de bonté pour vos amis, votre famille et vos collègues, et de prendre le temps de remarquer ceux des autres.

Kindness Week reminds us that we all have the opportunity to create the kind of community that we want to live in. I would like to encourage everybody to look for opportunities to be kind to other people and to take that opportunity this week. It's very important to do.

TENDERING PROCESS

Mr. Michael Harris: Today's Ministry of Labour announcement launching public consultations that focus on the Ontario Labour Relations Act provides government an opportunity to finally close a legislative loophole that allows labour monopolies to command local infrastructure tendering.

As the review announcement highlights "globalization and trade liberalization" as two workplace trends to be examined, we must ensure that examination results in fairness for local contractors to bid on publicly funded infrastructure projects in their own communities.

Given that the review is designed to support government's four-part economic plan to build new public infrastructure, I feel it's incumbent on government to ensure these projects are being tendered fairly. Taxpayers expect their infrastructure to be built with the highest-quality work at the lowest possible cost.

Much as we predicted, the impacts of closed tendering in my own community of the region of Waterloo and around the province are limiting competition while driving up the price for local infrastructure. Tendering restrictions across Ontario are wasting up to \$283 million annually.

Despite the widespread support I received for my Fair and Open Tendering Act, my aim to close this legislative loophole has yet to be realized. And while I look forward to round two, today I am hand-delivering a letter to the Minister of Labour to (1) invite him down to the region of Waterloo; (2) consult with local contractors and their workers; and (3) use that opportunity to restore fairness, open competition and sustainability to our public tendering process.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Mr. Arthur Potts: On February 21, in the great multicultural riding of Beaches–East York, I will be participating, in an enthusiastic way, in a ceremony celebrating International Mother Language Day.

The day was first recognized by UNESCO in 1999 and began as an annual observance in February 2000 in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital.

In 2009, this House unanimously passed a motion introduced by my colleague from the riding of Richmond Hill recognizing International Mother Language Day.

The origins of it trace back to February 21, 1952, when students from different schools gathered in Dhaka, in what was then East Pakistan, to rally in recognition of their mother language, Bangla. At that time, the government did not provide the opportunity for Bangla-language students to be educated in their mother tongue. The demonstration turned violent, and students were shot dead during the protest. So every year, February 21 is observed to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism, in honour of that tragedy.

Beaches–East York is home to one of the largest concentrations of residents from Bangladesh in this country. On Saturday, we will gather to recognize International Mother Language Day, and I will wear my red panjabi.

I recently met with Messrs. Rizwan Raham and Azim Dewan, who have launched a non-profit organization to erect an International Mother Language Day monument in the riding of Beaches–East York. They will reveal a new design in early March.

Please join me in recognizing this important day, and join us on Friday and Saturday for your own celebrations in your own ridings celebrating International Mother Language Day.

KALEY'S ACRES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's my pleasure to welcome again Adrian and Draupadi Quinn from Kaley's Acres and their

guests from Brandneu Foods, from my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. The Quinns were here in late November, when they received the 2014 Premier’s Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence for Kaley’s Acres.

In 2009, they converted 10 acres of former tobacco fields into kale production, and then transformed these leaves into delicious snacks.

These days, more and more nutrition-conscious consumers are reaching for healthy snacks. That’s exactly why Kaley’s Acres were recognized with the Premier’s award for innovation. They are producing kale in the form of chips, and they are delicious, Speaker.

I’m proud to have folks in my riding such as Draupadi and Adrian Quinn, with creative new ideas to help to keep our agricultural sector thriving and to create jobs along the way. We’re excited to have them back visiting us, and we’re really excited that they brought bags of kale chips to all members of this House.

Again, congratulations on a well-deserved, prestigious award, and welcome again to Queen’s Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members’ public business such that Madame Lalonde assumes ballot item number 34 and Ms. Wong assumes ballot item number 37.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, pursuant to the order of the House dated December 11, 2014, establishing the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, the Clerk of the House has received written notification from the House leaders of the recognized parties designating the membership of the committee as follows: Mr. Dong, Mr. Hillier, Madame Lalonde, Ms. Malhi, Mrs. McGarry, Ms. McMahan, Mr. Natyshak, Ms. Sattler; Ms. Scott, Vice-Chair; and Ms. Vernile, Chair.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following reports were tabled:

On January 6, 2015, the Election Returns with Statistics from the Records (2012, 2013, 2014 By-Elections and 2014 General Election), Volumes 1 and 2, from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

On January 13, 2015, the Annual Energy Conservation Progress Report 2014, from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

Finally, on January 27, 2015, the 2013-14 annual report of the Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team (OMLET) from the Ombudsman of Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated February 17, 2015, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report on The Cancellation and Relocation of the Gas Plants and Document Retention Issues from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Qaadri presents the committee’s report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. As the long-enduring Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, I am pleased to table the committee’s report today entitled The Cancellation and Relocation of the Gas Plants and Document Retention Issues.

The committee, Speaker, as you’ll appreciate, undertook two studies in this report, one concerning the tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants, and the other concerning the record-keeping practices of the Ontario government.

J’aimerais saisir l’occasion de remercier les membres du comité pour leur contribution. J’aimerais aussi remercier le personnel législatif, la greffière du comité, Tamara Pomanski, ainsi que les chercheurs, Jeff Parker and Ian Morris.

Speaker, at this time, with your indulgence, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Qaadri moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1519 to 1549.

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

Mr. Naqvi moves adjournment of the debate on the report by the committee—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Qaadri.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Qaadri; sorry. Mr. Qaadri. All members who—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I can't.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sounds like both of you can't.

All those voting in favour, rise at the same time to be counted by the Clerk.

Thank you. Please be seated.

All those opposed, please rise together to be counted by the Clerks.

Pray be seated.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 35.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The motion is carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTING INTERNS AND CREATING A LEARNING ECONOMY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES STAGIAIRES ET LA CRÉATION D'UNE ÉCONOMIE D'APPRENTISSAGE

Ms. Sattler moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 64, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités et la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill, which is known as the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act, 2015, includes two schedules that were previously introduced as two separate private members' bills.

Schedule 1, the Learning Through Workplace Experience Act, amends the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to establish the advisory council on work-integrated learning. The council's members are appointed by the minister from various groups, with the mandate to advise the minister on expanding work-integrated learning opportunities in Ontario. The mandate also includes making recommendations with respect to a website for sharing information about work-integrated learning opportunities and requires the council to report annually on Ontario's progress in this area.

Schedule 2, the Greater Protection for Interns and Vulnerable Workers Act, extends certain provisions of

the Employment Standards Act to students in secondary and post-secondary work experience programs, as well as individuals receiving training.

New requirements are imposed on employers with respect to individuals receiving training, including the requirement to provide information, to provide a day off work on a public holiday and to provide vacation without pay.

The schedule also amends the act with respect to allegations that the act has been or is being contravened so that allegations may be provided to the ministry anonymously or through a third party.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Without notice. Agreed? Agreed.

Minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move that notwithstanding standing order 98, the following changes be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr. Vanthof and Ms. Horwath exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Vanthof assumes ballot item number 27 and Ms. Horwath assumes ballot item number 35.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that Mr. Vanthof and Ms. Horwath exchange places in order—I'm sorry; a little rusty.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense. All in favour? Approved? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

CURRICULUM

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2010, the Ontario Liberal government promised to consult with the public before implementing a revised sex education curriculum;

"Whereas since 2010, the Ontario public has not been given opportunity to provide feedback on proposed sex education changes;

"Whereas in late October, 2014, the Ontario Liberal government announced that more revisions to the sex education curriculum would be implemented in time for the next school year;

"Whereas the announced plans to consult only one hand-picked parent per school does not constitute broad

public feedback on the curriculum, and therefore, the Ontario Liberal government is breaking its 2010 promise to consult with the people of Ontario;

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

“To publicly release the updated version of the sexual education curriculum that will be taught in Ontario schools in September 2015 promptly; to allow the people of Ontario to review the updated curriculum and provide meaningful feedback to be considered by the Ontario government in the name of transparency and accountability.”

I approve of this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to—

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: This is a very important petition for the people of Iroquois Falls.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is responsible for the governance and management of forestry;

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products holds 44% of the sustainable forest licence (SFL) in the Abitibi forest;

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products have announced their intent to give up their wood rights;

“Whereas the sustainable forest licence (SFL) is a critical element in the marketability for economic development in the town of Iroquois Falls to potential business interests;

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

“Appeal to the Ministry of Natural Resources to institute a moratorium on the transfer of the SFL for the wood rights being abandoned by Resolute Forest Products in the Abitibi River forest ... to ensure that new entrants into the marketplace are able to apply for the SFL.”

I fully agree and add my signature.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

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

“Whereas the Ontario government is committed to ensuring the safety of drivers, passengers and pedestrians on Ontario’s roads and making the province North America’s most cycling friendly jurisdiction; and

“Whereas, on average, one person is killed on Ontario’s roads every 18 hours, and one person is injured every 8.1 minutes; and

“Whereas drivers who use cellphones while driving are four times more likely to be in a crash than non-distracted drivers; and

“Whereas the evidence has shown that Ontario’s impaired driving laws need to be strengthened to apply

sanctions for driving under the influence of alcohol to those impaired by drugs;

“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 31, the Making Ontario’s Roads Safer act, 2014.”

I fully support the petition and will give my petition to Rachel.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.”

I approve of this petition, affix my name to it and give it to Julie.

1600

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was given to me by M^{me} Ginette Lefebvre, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane, Mr. John Vanthof, has introduced Bill 46 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that UTVs (utility task vehicles) would be treated like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the Highway Traffic Act;

“Whereas this bill to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect to UTVs was introduced on November 24, 2014;

“Whereas this bill will have positive economic impact on clubs, manufacturers, dealers and rental shops and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario “to vote in favour of MPP Vanthof’s Bill 46 to allow UTVs the same access as ATVs in the Highway Traffic Act.”

I fully support this position, will affix my name to it and ask page Arlyne to bring it—

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

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote

economic growth without relying on taxpayers' resources;

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

"Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario's economy and create jobs in three ways:

"—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

"—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

"—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries."

Speaker, I agree with this, affix my name to it and give it to page Natalie to bring to the desk.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed here by a great number of my constituents in Oxford county, and the petitions keep coming in, in order to convince the government that they shouldn't have a landfill site in a mined-out quarry.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the purpose of Ontario's Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to 'provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.' RSO 1990...; and

"Whereas 'all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.'—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

"That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario."

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to read this petition on behalf of my constituents, Mr. Speaker.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's youth justice facilities are run by two completely different sets of policy guidelines depending on whether they are part of the Ontario public service (OPS) and funded directly by the provincial government, or the broader public service (BPS) and funded indirectly; and

"Whereas OPS and BPS facilities serve the very same youth, and both receive their funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services; and

"Whereas, unlike in similar OPS facilities, there is no provincial mandate for youth corrections community

agencies to provide WSIB coverage, meaning many agencies have inadequate private insurance coverage; and

"Whereas youth corrections community agencies are struggling with chronic underfunding;

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

"We strongly urge the provision of a provincial mandate for all youth corrections agencies to provide WSIB coverage to their staff. We further urge the assembly to improve systemic inequities by ensuring that all youth corrections facilities receive proper funding."

I couldn't agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Andrew to bring to the Clerk.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further petitions? I recognize the member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back to the chair.

I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas some establishments have instituted unfair tipping practices in which a portion of tips and gratuities are being deducted and kept by owners; and

"Whereas employees in establishments where tipping is a standard practice, such as restaurants, bars and hair salons, supplement their income with tips and gratuities and depend on those to maintain an adequate standard of living; and

"Whereas customers expect that when they leave a tip or a gratuity that the benefit will be going to the employees who directly contributed to that positive experience;

"Whereas most establishments do respect their employees and do not collect their tips and gratuities unfairly and thus are left at a disadvantage compared to those owners who use the tips and gratuities to pad their margins;

"Whereas other jurisdictions in North America such as Quebec, New Brunswick and New York City have passed legislation to protect employees' tips;

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

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support Bill 12, the Protecting Employees' Tips Act, 2014, and help shield Ontario employees and businesses from operators with improper tipping practices while protecting accepted and standard practices such as tip pooling among employees."

I agree with this petition. I sign my name and leave it with page William.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have some 2,500 petitions in support of improved winter road maintenance. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

“Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

“Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario’s highways are safe for travellers;

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

“That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor.”

I’m pleased to support this petition.

MISSING PERSONS

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

“Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

“Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

“Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

“Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

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

“We ask that the Attorney General’s office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause.”

It’s my pleasure to give this petition to Ishani and sign it as well. Thank you.

CREDIT UNIONS

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families

to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

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

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

“—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

“—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

“—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I’m pleased to support this petition. I affix my name to it and I hand it to page Eileen.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

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

“Whereas it has been over a decade since regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act has been updated to recognize the new classes of off-road vehicles and a motion to do so passed on November 7, 2013, with the unanimous support of the provincial Legislature;

“Whereas owners of two-up ATVs and side-by-side UTVs deserve clarity in knowing which roadways and trails they are legally permitted to use with these off-road vehicles;

“Whereas owners using off-road vehicles should be able to legally access woodlots, trails, as well as hunting and fishing destinations;

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

“That the private member’s Bill 58, which seeks to update the Highway Traffic Act to include new classes of all-terrain and utility task vehicles, receive swift passage through the Legislature.”

I agree with this, will sign it and send it to the table with Amber.

1610

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is home to over 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Hispanic Canadians who originate from the 23 Hispanic countries around the world; and who have made significant contributions to the growth and vibrancy of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas October is a month of great significance for the Hispanic community worldwide; and allows an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future

generations about the outstanding achievements of Hispanic peoples to our province's social, economic and multicultural fabric;

"We, the undersigned, call upon members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming October of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month and support Bill 28 by MPP Cristina Martins from the riding of Davenport."

I agree with this, affix my signature and give it to page Muntder to bring forward.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (MAKING ONTARIO'S ROADS SAFER), 2015 LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT (ACCROÎTRE LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE EN ONTARIO)

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 8, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 31, An Act to amend the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 and the Highway Traffic Act in respect of various matters and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act / Projet de loi 31, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur l'autoroute 407 Est et le Code de la route en ce qui concerne diverses questions et apportant une modification corrélative à la Loi sur les infractions provinciales.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When we last debated Bill 31, the member for Hamilton Mountain had nine minutes and 14 seconds remaining. To the member.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to have the opportunity to have some more time to speak on this very important matter before it's time-allocated like everything else has been time-allocated in the last session. I'm hoping that we're not going to see that again going forward.

What I did talk about, Speaker, was—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: Let me just give some background on where I was. This bill offers some great solutions that I am happy to support, but it's not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. I hope that we can see some amendments when it goes to committee. The bill revisits the issues brought forward in the previous Parliament in Bill 34, the Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act, in relation to the collection of fines by municipalities, and also Bill 173, an amendment to the same act in relation to keeping Ontario roads safe. It also introduces some new measures to address drugged driving, as well as some changes to the Highway 407 East Act.

I had talked about some statistics from the CAA. I think I'll say those once again, because they speak a

thousand words when it comes to distracted driving. It says drivers engaged in text messaging on a cellphone are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or a near-crash event, compared with non-distracted drivers. Eighty per cent of collisions and 65% of near-crashes have some form of driver inattention as a contributing factor. Distracted drivers are three times more likely to be in a crash rather than attentive drivers. International research shows that 20% to 30% of all collisions involve a distracted driver.

In March of this year, the OPP reported that distracted driving was the number one killer on our roads patrolled by the OPP, and there were 78 people killed as a result of distracted driving-related crashes in 2013.

Those numbers are absolutely astounding, Speaker. I think that we really need to be looking at ways that we can be talking to people, that we can be educating our young people, having signs on the highways talking about how distracted driving kills. Here we are talking about reading signs on the highway, but we have to do something to bump it up.

I think the fines are going to be raised considerably, which is necessary because distracted driving is killing people. We see it every day. I drive back and forth from Hamilton to Toronto. I take road trips through the province. I'm constantly seeing people reading and texting on their BlackBerrys like nothing is being enforced. It's something that needs to be talked about.

I was also speaking, the last time I had a chance to speak to this debate, about tinted windows and how I had sent a letter to the minister regarding this. Actually, the same day I sent the letter was the day that he tabled this bill. Unfortunately, I haven't received a response back from the minister regarding that, and I would really love to know his comments and his thoughts on that, because I think that if we have people who are texting and we have dark, tinted windows, the police officers can't see through those windows. I think it's absolutely critical that police are enforcing the rules that they have in place. Some jurisdictions in Canada have laws that either make tinting of vehicle windows illegal or limit the extent of the tinting. In Ontario, however, the hazard to driving is left to the discretion of the police officer at the scene, with no specific limits set in law. If an officer believes a particular tinted window obstructs a driver's view or obscures the view into a vehicle, they can write a ticket for the offence.

So I was hoping that I was going to beat the minister to tabling that bill in saying, "This is maybe something that you should be looking at coming through this legislation," but, like I said, he tabled it the same day. I'm hopeful that he will make amendments. I would love to see a response to my letter that I sent him a couple of months back to reflect his thoughts on that.

The bill also extends existing provisions for drunk driving so that charges can be laid for drugged drivers. While it's important to address the problem of people driving under the influence of drugs, it has proven difficult to serve convictions using the field physical co-

ordination tests that are proposed in this bill. Mothers Against Drunk Driving has reported that only 1.9% of total impaired driving charges laid in Canada in 2012 were for drug impairment. They have called for the development of a road test, similar to a Breathalyzer, to identify drugged drivers. I understand that the government is looking into the technology that might be available for such a test, and I encourage them to follow through on that work.

I have some concerns with the plans, through this bill, to outsource the vehicle inspection centre system to a private operator. Firstly, the actual model is largely unspecified in this bill, but it has been determined that it will involve a private delegated administrative authority with a relationship to the government similar to that of Tarion for new homeowners or the Technical Standards and Safety Authority.

The bill specifies that the administrator of this new vehicle inspection centre system is not an agent of the crown. As such, our vehicle inspection operators would not be subject to the oversight that government bodies would normally encounter, such as by the Ombudsman or the Auditor General. We've seen the track record when it comes to accountability and oversight with this government. Many members on this side of the House have been calling for Ombudsman oversight. They're starting to inch away at some of those things, but on other things they fell flat—by creating a single person for the hospital oversight and not having the Ombudsman doing that, which is going to be at the responsibility of the government. We're still not getting the proper oversight.

I was calling for Ombudsman oversight for the children's aid society. They gave it to the child advocate for some parts, but there are still so many parts of that system that are in dire need of some true oversight mechanisms. I know that the minister is looking at me on this, and I'm hoping that we can work together to make sure we do have a true oversight of our children's aid societies.

So, like I said, this government are shouting from the rooftops that they are accountable and they are transparent, but they always seem to do the opposite. They talk one thing and they do the complete opposite. It's usually the bill with the really great name that they can spout about and say how wonderful they are by bringing out this bill, and yet it really is just barely scratching the surface of the need that Ontarians are telling us about every single day.

One of the other concerns—the 407 and the invoices is a major problem. They can just absolutely suspend your licence—like, jeez. And what is it: 25%? They get a 25% annual return on their investment for the 407. That was quite the gem that the Conservatives gave over on that one.

1620

One of the other subjects that I wanted to talk about was drivers who have lost their licence due to medical concerns. The drivers that I speak to understand it. They get it. They don't want to be behind the wheel when

they're not safe and healthy to be so, but once they are told they're safe and healthy by their doctor, it takes two months for them to get their licence back because of the system and the process it has to go through.

I know that every single member in this House, including the Liberals on the other side, have heard these same complaints. There's no way that this is only happening to the people in Hamilton Mountain and people in Niagara. It's happening everywhere. It's something that really needs to be addressed by this government. We need to try to crunch that down. Once we have a doctor's note, that should be it. People should be allowed to drive again. It shouldn't take six to eight weeks to have that turned around and people be able to get their licence back because, quite frankly, some people, if they can't drive, they can't work. An employer isn't always going to be so graceful with their time.

Thank you, Speaker. I've enjoyed this debate and look forward to the next one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? The Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: And women's issues, too, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): And women's issues, too.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you.

I'm happy to speak for a couple of minutes on Bill 31.

For the last 13 years, Ontario has been ranked either first or second in North America for road safety, and we're proud of that record. However, we know there's always more we can do. Keeping our roads safe is a very high priority for our government. This bill, Bill 31, not only serves to protect drivers on our roads, but it introduces a number of provisions that will help keep pedestrians and cyclists safe in Ontario.

This is very timely for me because one of my twins just got his driver's licence in the last couple of months and the other one's going for her licence this Friday. So I'm very interested in the improvements that I think this bill will help address.

Some of the stats, Speaker, are quite compelling. Over 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system. Drinking and driving fatalities represent nearly one quarter of all fatalities. That's from 2011. From 2008 to 2012, an average of 14 convicted alcohol-impaired drivers were repeat offenders. If these and other trends continue, we're going to be very concerned about what's going on on our roads in Ontario. We know that in 2011 pedestrians constituted one in five motor-vehicle-related fatalities.

There's a lot of support for this bill, Speaker. I know that the Minister of Transportation has consulted heavily on this bill with key stakeholders. I have a very long list; I won't have time to go through it all. I think it's a very important bill that we can all get behind and I look forward to its speedy passage in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I had the pleasure of catching the end of my colleague's speech. I thought it was well done. It covered some of the key issues that we see in terms of safety on our roads.

I think that distracted driving is certainly, as our honourable member points out, something that's a serious issue, particularly when it comes to our youth. They are not aware of some of the connections between distracted driving and rates and incidences of accidents and collisions. It's something where perhaps with more education, more awareness would work towards discouraging some of that distracted driving and making our roads safer.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain also brought up a very important part about some of our concerns around accountability or, more specifically, the lack of accountability when it comes to this government. The fact is that they had a great opportunity to address one of the huge oversights when it comes to accountability in our health sector, which was the fact that the Ombudsman doesn't have oversight over the health sector. They could have addressed that by increasing or broadening the mandate. Instead, what they created was a brand new, separate, independent ombudsman who doesn't have the scope, doesn't have the same powers, doesn't have the same ability to enact change, doesn't have the same oversight mechanisms that the Ombudsman does have. Instead, it created another, separate organization or a separate form of oversight which is not as effective, which doesn't have the same level of protection and accountability for the people of Ontario, and they've dropped the ball. Our concern when it comes to this government implementing accountability and oversight mechanisms is that they've consistently shown that they're not able to do it.

One other key issue that was brought up is the outsourcing of those licensing centres. We've seen great signs of trouble because of those centres, and we need to address that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome back to 2015. I'm very pleased to stand here today to support Bill 31. As you heard earlier today, I brought in some petitions from my riding of Scarborough—Agin-court supporting Bill 31. Just today, so that every member of the House knows, Toronto police are actually dealing with this particular issue of distracted drivers and the issue that distracted drivers kill. It is very important that we have legislation in this Legislature to support our local law enforcement.

I'm very, very pleased to be here to support the bill, but I wanted to draw on the member opposite from Hamilton Mountain about this bill, particularly the issue about demerit points. No one in this House could contest the fact that people have been charged but their demerit points have not been affected by either drinking and driving or running a red light. Just to give you an example, Mr. Speaker, just yesterday I lost a resident in my

riding from running a red light. He might be getting charged by the Toronto police—that's a police matter. But the fact that one of my frail seniors just passed away yesterday because of running a red light—we know the consequences of running red lights.

But more importantly, we now have proposed legislation that, if passed, will then toughen the penalty. No one in this House can contest the fact that improving demerit points, increasing the fines and also allowing municipalities—because we often hear when we go back to our constituencies that the municipalities have to collect the fines, but they don't get to participate to get the fine. If the law, Bill 31, is passed, municipalities will have an opportunity to collect defaulted and appealed fines. That's a good thing.

I encourage everybody in this House to move this bill forward to go to committee so we can have further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Back to the—

Interjection: No, no. One more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Oh, there is one more? I'm sorry; forgive me. Okay. I recognize the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you for recognizing me after the long break. I want to thank the member for her comments on Bill 31—she's always very passionate and wonderful to listen to—and the member opposite who mentioned that this could be a revenue tool for the municipalities. I think we're all for that, because the municipalities have a lot of responsibility in the province, and they need those revenue tools.

Just this morning, as I was coming down to Queen's Park, I heard that the police were doing a bit of a blitz to raise awareness, as well as watching if people were driving distracted. There was a gentleman who came on who had been stopped by the police in a hearse. I guess that's to send a message, and I think he felt that it was a strong message to him. He was driving down University while texting, and we all know that it just takes a split second.

I always used to say to my kids when I was running carpool that it just takes a moment that you distract me and we could all be hurt. I think it's something that we all have to be more cognizant of, and we all have to focus on not just the fact that people are texting and driving. I think that there are movies being played in cars, which can be very distracting for the driver. We all see the YouTube videos—I hope the cars aren't actually moving—where people are performing; Frozen was a popular one this year. We saw the mothers and daughters—and fathers and daughters—singing along. It was hard sometimes to tell if the cars were moving or not, but I have a feeling that, oftentimes as not, those cars were moving, and maybe there was somebody in the passenger seat filming it.

I think that the real crux of the matter is that we're all spending way too much time in our cars. In this cold weather, it's a little bit difficult to take public transit, so I

think that we're seeing that people are going to be car-dependent. This is the great white north, and as long as there's traffic we're going to be spending that extra time in cars, so we've got to address traffic as well.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Hamilton Mountain for her final response.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services and for women's issues; to the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton; the member from Scarborough-Agincourt; and the member from Thornhill.

I was really hoping to hear from the Minister of Children and Youth Services about oversight, because when I was talking about oversight she was giving me the nod, like, "Yes, yes, yes, I've got something right here." But when she stood up, she talked about her children, who are getting their licence—and congratulations to them; that's a wonderful time. But I know she must be hoping that there will be stricter fines, that there will be something in this legislation to make a difference.

Let me just make this quick point: The fine could be up to \$500 for not having a proper light on your bicycle. Yet a minimum fine for distracted driving is \$300. We have to really enforce this. We have to make it strong and we have to make it real so that people get it: that distracted driving kills people. A light on your bicycle is a major problem for drivers, but the fines just don't make sense.

We'd love to see some amendments to this bill. We need to talk about the MTO; we need to talk about medical reviews and changes to them. I'd love to see something in there about tinted windows. We just really need to get cracking down on this issue of distracted drivers, of people on their BlackBerrys while they're driving. I think that's probably the key to this entire bill, to making sure that we get it right and making sure that we scare enough people by the fines that will be imposed—that they're not going to want to pick up their phone, and if they do, they're going to be paying for it.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have had the opportunity to speak to this very important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker; thank you for the time. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. We share some interest in municipal politics and urban public policy. We share a passion for it, so I'm thrilled to be sharing my time with him.

I also want to recognize the comments by the member for Hamilton Mountain. I very strongly agree with what she said, particularly on the issue of tinted windows.

This bill, which struggled for passage in the last sitting of this House, is really a work in progress. The government passed several parallel pieces of legislation—sorry; policy frameworks that support this legislation. One of

them is Cycle Ontario. We put out the one-year action plan, which has to be finished by July of this year.

Many of the commitments the government made in that one-year action plan are things like the one-metre rule, things like the higher fines that the member from Hamilton Mountain mentioned. This raises our fines to about the highest in the country, and treats "dooring" as collisions. As someone who cycles 12 months a year and doesn't own a car, I can tell you I spend most of my time white-knuckled on the streets, looking constantly at people's doors to see who is going to open them and not look. It's sadly often a one-way view. It saddens me that people open their doors not recognizing that there's often a cyclist to their immediate left. Those injuries are terrible and push people into oncoming cars, and we know it's a significant cause of fatalities.

I've said many times in this place that through most of its history, the Parliament at Queen's Park has always been a much less partisan place than it has been today. I've tried very hard as a minister and a member here to try and ensure that it isn't always a government-opposition dynamic.

This bill was one of my first bills. It's not mine now; it obviously belongs to my very capable friend from Vaughan, the Minister of Transportation. But this is the House at its best. The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has his fingerprints on this, in the commitments that we're making today, between all parties here, to ensure that we have proper shoulders for cyclists, but also just to make our roads safer. Any of us who have lived in the northern parts of this country, above the 49th parallel, know how important that is for cyclists and for others.

The member for Simcoe North has his fingerprints on this, on the protection of towing and emergency-vehicle drivers; very, very good work.

The member for Parkdale-High Park was the original author of the one-metre rule in this House. She introduced it first and she has seen that embedded in this bill—as well as my friend from Scarborough-Rouge River, who has campaigned long and hard for distracted driving legislation, and this puts us ahead.

I always think, when you've had a minority government, if all parties in that situation learn the lessons of collaboration and being parliamentarians and Ontarians before we embrace a partisan stripe, we can get a lot more done. I wish this bill had happened—and I know there were members on both sides of the House who fought with some of the more partisan elements in each of their parties to get this done, but we weren't successful. This bill itself now, I think, is that. I hope that we can do more of this kind of stuff.

As I've said, it was interesting. In Norway, in New Zealand, and now just recently, last week, in the United Kingdom, those countries' party leaders signed agreements that they would not make climate change a partisan issue. In their national legislatures, they recognized some issues as being so overwhelmingly critical to our survival as a species that they have set those things aside, and there's a great spirit in this. So I appreciate many of

the comments that have been made that have been positive, and I think this bill has been, in many ways, the Legislature at its very, very best.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, I have never lived in a place where I have felt so unsafe on my bicycle. About 25%, one in four Ontarians, could probably cycle to work, if you look at the percentage of commutes that are less than five kilometres. I walked today, but I most often bicycle. I think the perception that the member for Thornhill raised was one that I don't agree with. She said, well, we live in the north, and public transit is too cold; therefore, we all have to drive cars. Well, we're massively investing in Viva bus service north. York region is one of the leaders in reforming land use. My friend from Newmarket–Aurora was one of the authors of many of those policies in his municipal career. We're now building walkable neighbourhoods. I don't understand how it's too cold to use public transit. I really don't understand that. I haven't used public transit because I'm outside. I get people who look at me and say, "You rode your bike this weekend in 40 below?" Yes, I was out for half as much time. I mean, if you think about most of my friends who had to shovel, they spent more time trying to get their car started and out of their driveway. I was already to where I had to go by the time you got there.

We're not a generation of wusses. I came from good Ukrainian stock. People were dumped off at the end of an incomplete railroad in the middle of bald prairie, and somehow we survived, and today we're afraid to take public transit. I walked down Bay Street the other day, 10 blocks. Do you know how many cars I saw with more than one passenger in them out of several hundred cars? Three. You want to understand: Our fastest area of greenhouse gas emissions is because of the kinds of attitudes expressed by my friend from Thornhill, that you have to have the one person in a car, burning up gasoline like it's going out of style. If you're going to drive a car that much, get an electric vehicle. Every major auto manufacturer makes an electric vehicle. You can go 120 kilometres easily today, and the average commute is something less than 40. Very few people commute over 50.

If you care about your kids—I've said one thing, Mr. Speaker, that it should be a requirement and a law in this Legislature, to sit here, that you do one thing: You have to Google "four degrees mean temperature change." You should all do that, and I'll say it to my friends in the Conservative Party who seem to have some trouble believing climate change is actually happening. It will scare the bejesus out of you. If it doesn't motivate you to come in here and understand why people like President Obama, a fairly liberal Democrat, and someone like David Cameron, a fairly conservative Conservative from the UK, have identified this as their countries' number one priority—because what this four degrees Celsius means is that the drought that we've been experiencing in California for the last three years, which is pushing up our grocery prices, making food less affordable for

working families and poor families of Ontario, is about to become a nightmare. NASA—one of the most conservative science organizations in the world, the people who send people to the moon and Mars and off to the rings of Jupiter—have just come out with a study last week that said the droughts in California will likely go on between 20 and 40 years. If you actually realize that about 40, 50, 60 years out, somewhere in that range, we'll be at four degrees Celsius, those droughts are permanent. That's one third of North Americans' food supply.

1640

How are you going to feed your children and your grandchildren if we don't turn this around?

I love the uninformed views about the investments we're making in public transportation in this bill and making our roads safe for people to walk and cycle and skateboard and get on to streetcars and buses. Why is that so important? Because the consequences of four degrees Celsius are horrific.

It's the loss of most of our reefs. I went out at age 57 and learned how to scuba dive. Why? Because I look fabulous in a spandex scuba suit? I would love to tell you that was the case. But I do not look fabulous. I look like a sack of potatoes. I couldn't even get a good look from a clown fish. It was a very humbling experience being down there at 18 metres.

I'll tell you, when you see a living reef and you see a dead reef, you realize that 60% of our ocean aquatic life—everything from micro-organisms to big sharks and whales—depends on those reefs, and 25% of them are dead. A one-degree Celsius change in temperature is wiping out our reefs—one degree.

I'm a grandfather, and I've got a son. Why do I ride my bike to work every day? For my grandson, because I want my grandson to be a crotchety old man like me one day. He has the full right to be an old geezer one day. I want him to live that long.

Right now, at four degrees Celsius—if you haven't done it, Google "four degrees Celsius."

Ocean acidification: Do you know that in our Great Lakes right now, the plankton are dying? The crustaceans, daphnia, our little microcrustaceans, the micro-organisms that support all of the freshwater fish—that's the base of the food chain—cannot form shells now because, already in 2014, the levels of acidification are there.

This is as much a climate change bill as it is a road user safety bill—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member for Thornhill on a point of order.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I was wondering if maybe we changed bills because we seem to be straying off topic. That's all; thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I remind the minister to stick to the bill that's before us.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'll take that from the member for Thornhill as, she'll go home and Google "four degrees Celsius," so she can understand why I disagreed

with her when I said that we're not going to get people out of cars.

If you have kids, and I know you do, and you care about intergenerational equity, as I know you do—believe me, this is one of the most important pieces of climate change because it's the thing that you and I must do together. I mean this very sincerely and in a non-partisan way.

I grew up in the suburbs in Beaconsfield, out on the West Island, as part of the great anglophone diaspora that came to Ontario. My parents drove a car everywhere. My dad had a new Taurus every three years. I hated that car. If you're a gay kid trying to go out to the bars, it is the uncoolest car ever. You cannot pick up anyone in Montreal if you're an anglophone in a Taurus. I'm sorry. It made my life—I'm joking.

I grew up in that culture, right? We lived in cul-de-sacs. We didn't even have sidewalks. We had to use a litre of gasoline to get a litre of milk. I thought that was normal. We've all got to learn that that's not normal. If you want to drive a car, it's an electric vehicle; it's a low-carbon vehicle. These are the things that we must do. We say that the climate change strategy is overarching.

It's not too cold to ride your bike. I did it all weekend. I do it most weeks. It's not too cold.

I'm about to wrap up, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to conclude my remarks and leave some time for my brilliant, insightful friend from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rejoin all of my colleagues here in the House after our winter recess.

Indeed Bill 31 is a bill that I think all members of this Legislature and all residents of this province can endorse because it goes to the heart of what we all do. We're all either pedestrians or cyclists or we're in a motor vehicle. Our safety is the most important thing each and every day. There's nothing more important that the government can do than ensure the safety of its residents and citizens. This bill has a number of provisions that are going to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers and passengers in motor vehicles. It's very important, and it's very timely that we're introducing it.

As a municipal councillor, keeping the roads and streets in my community was always one of the overarching responsibilities I had. I know that my constituents, whether they are drivers, cyclists or pedestrians in the riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, are going to be very happy when this legislation passes and is enacted. While this province has been ranked first or second in North America for road safety for the last 13 years, I know my constituents will be proud to hear that this government is doing even more to ensure the safety of everyone on our streets and roads.

On the subject of cyclists, there are many cyclists, even in a suburban community like Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who do ride their bikes every day, whether the weather is hot or it's cold and everything in between. From Lake Shore Boulevard in the south to Burnham-

thorpe in the north, the West Mall in the west, to Prince Edward Drive in the east, my residents are riding their bicycles to go to school, go to work, go to do shopping or to go to a public transit station and continue their journey further along. Anything that makes their daily commutes safer is going to be very welcome.

Bill 31 introduces amendments that address the safety of cyclists, including key recommendations from the #CycleON Action Plan, which was released earlier last spring. Mr. Speaker, cyclists in my riding and throughout the province will be happy to note that Bill 31 addresses the key issues, such as contra-flow bike lanes, bicycle-specific traffic signals and riding on paved shoulders, all of which will contribute to safer cycling environments for cyclists but also improve road safety for all road users, whether they're drivers or pedestrians, by making the roads safer.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to speak to how Bill 31 addresses other road safety issues that are major challenges in our province, including the very serious issue of impaired driving and distracted driving. Anybody who is on the roads of our province will encounter somebody using their cellphone or doing something else in their vehicle that is distracting them, where they are clearly not paying attention. They are trying to change a lane and cut you off. They are stopped at a green light or any of a number of other instances of bad driving or dangerous driving habits. Having these measures in place that will have stronger penalties around distracted driving is something which I think all Ontarians are looking forward to.

On the issue of drinking and driving fatalities, they represented close to a quarter of all fatalities on the roads in 2011. But according to recent statistics, over 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system.

While there are sanctions to allow police to remove drivers from the road when they reasonably believe they have been impaired by alcohol, there are currently no provincial sanctions available for police to remove drivers from the road who they reasonably believe might be impaired by drugs. That's why we need to pass this bill, Mr. Speaker: to make sure that our law enforcement officials have all the tools that they can have in their tool kit to keep dangerous drivers off of our roads, to make sure that people who, whether they are impaired or they're not operating their vehicle in a safe manner because they are distracted—that they can be stopped, they can be fined and they can be removed from their vehicle at that moment, if need be, to ensure that everybody else can be on their way in a safe manner. So, Mr. Speaker, these provisions in Bill 31 are so incredibly important. I think all members of this House should embrace them and support them.

I also just wanted to say a few things that when—some comments have been made about linking climate change to this bill, and some have thought that's not really appropriate. Climate change is a real issue. Safe roads and allowing people to use our roads as complete streets is related to climate change.

1650

Making sure that our pedestrians have more confidence that when they walk on a street or a road, knowing that for those who are either impaired or those who are driving distracted, there are more tools in place to get them off the road; and to ensure that there's better public education around those issues so that all road users are safe; and encouraging more people to be pedestrians, encouraging more people to be cyclists, will improve our environment, will have a positive impact on climate change. While that's not the key issue in this bill, which is road safety, there will be benefits from this bill to encourage more people to use our streets as complete streets, complete roads, where all users can use them more safely.

In the time that I've been in the Legislature, now some eight or nine months, I've been proud to serve in a government where a number of important pieces of legislation have been passed. This, however, I can say to my constituents and to people all across Ontario, might be one of the pieces of legislation which will have the greatest impact on their daily lives, because it will make the roads and the streets that we all use each and every day safer. It will give them more confidence that law enforcement has tools in place to get irresponsible or reckless drivers off the road, and to make sure that there's the ability of municipalities to put in place better facilities for all road users to be able to navigate the highways and byways of this province safely and with the expectation that they can arrive at their destination or go home in the evening and be safe.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 31.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that we keep sort of straying off the topic—and I just want to address that—which is that we need to somehow stop driving cars. I think, as somebody who likes to walk and likes to cycle, I don't really appreciate some of the lecturing that we see from the opposite side of the floor. I think that if we're really serious about helping people get out of cars, then we need a government—this is a majority government. They're the ones who are in power and can make the decisions to help get people out of their cars. And that's not just about downtown Toronto. That's about York region. That's about Hamilton. We have to look at it neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

But to expect people in this kind of weather to take public transit in the suburbs, where it's 20 minutes, 30 minutes to wait for a bus, is not realistic. In fact, it's not even safe. So we have to make the roads safe. We have to make the commutes shorter. We have to get people to be able to get in their car and not have to use it as a moving office, which is all too often what we're seeing. It's a moving office, or for families it's a den on wheels or a kitchen on wheels. Parents are giving their kids supper in the car on their way to hockey practice because the commute is so long.

I think that we have to focus the valuable transit dollars. I've spoken before about the rapidway that they're taking off of Highway 7, the Viva rapidway onto Bathurst, which is going to create traffic chaos for, as far as I'm concerned, a huge swath of miles for years to come. It's an over-\$100-million project and a four-year construction, and that money could be going for a better use. If we need to get people off the Yonge subway line because it's past capacity, then maybe we should be doing what other major cities do, which is tunnel under the Yonge subway line from downtown and build an express subway route up to the suburbs. But we cannot expect people to stand outside waiting for buses. People are going to use cars, and we have to be realistic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Hello. Welcome back, everybody. It's kind of nice. But I want to talk on the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. He did a 12-minute speech on a number of things. But let's not fool ourselves; climate change is an important issue. He's very passionate about it, so I'll give him that.

He talked about how we've got to get people out of their cars. I agree with that. I think everybody in the House agrees. But I've been here for a year talking about bringing GO trains to Niagara Falls, and guess what? It's not happening.

I'm trying to figure it out. If the government is saying to me, "We've got to get people out of their cars," what better way to do it? When I do my 20 minutes I'll tell you what happened to me last Friday on the way home from Toronto—I was here last Friday and drove home—and what I had to go through. I agree with them; let's get people out of their cars. But do you know what? You've got to bring GO to Niagara.

Via Rail—I used to get up at 6:30 in the morning. I'd get on Via Rail when I used to come to Toronto, and then I'd go to the Sheraton to participate in some bargaining, whether it would be with GM or one of the units that we were representing. I'd come back afterwards, get on the Via Rail, and go home back to Niagara.

Hon. James J. Bradley: What happened to Via Rail?

Mr. Wayne Gates: What happened? Via Rail is gone.

Interjection: You've got to go to Rob Nicholson.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I understand that, but I'm using that as an example. Those are the things we have to do as a province and as a country.

Then, last Friday—because I want to stay on the bill, because I don't want anybody from the Conservatives jumping in, "Oh, you're not staying on the bill"—I was leaving here at a quarter after 3—

Interjection: Go back to the bill.

Mr. Wayne Gates: This is part of the bill, I think. I'm driving down the road, and I come to a stoplight just two blocks from here. There's a young lady there, and guess what? At a red light, what's she doing? She's talking on the phone. Talking on the phone, right? I'm beeping my horn. I'm trying to get her attention. I couldn't get her

attention. Finally, the light turns green, she looks over, and I go like this to her: "I'm watching you." There's why we have to educate our young people how dangerous it is to be driving and texting. Anyway, there you go. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: It's a pleasure to rise in the House and to comment on what my colleague the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore said. I've also been listening to the comments from across the floor.

I just want to remind everyone here that this bill is about road safety. Road safety includes anyone who uses those roads, including cyclists. I heard the argument about how this is going to promote more awareness of the environment and climate change, and that is very true, because if the road is safe to ride a bike, more people will be riding their bikes when the weather permits. It's completely their choice. This morning, while I was walking my dog, I saw a couple of cyclists using the bike lane on my street. This is great. If the weather is not too cold for them, should they choose to ride a bike, go ahead. All power to them.

I disagree with the member from Thornhill saying that this bill is intended to force people out of their cars. Where are the rights of the driver? Well, I need to remind you that part of this bill is to improve provisions on the 407. I want to remind this House that it was the Conservative government, when they were in power, who sold the 407. Talking about drivers' customer experience, talking about drivers' rights—they sold the highway.

We are making the biggest investment in the last 50 or 60 years in public infrastructure. You've got to be really fair looking at what we are proposing, and really understand what this bill is talking about. I was at the announcement with the minister because I'm fully in support of road safety, and I think that everyone who uses the road deserves this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to say, because the debate so far has had nothing to do with the actual bill, and that includes the first 12 minutes from the environment minister, who spoke about climate change. Last time I checked, there was nothing in this bill dealing with climate change, and then everybody who has spoken after has talked about climate change, so perhaps I should be talking about climate change. The minister really lost me, though, when he was talking about Speedos and a sack of potatoes. At that point, it was all over for me.

But let's go to the bill here just for a second, Mr. Speaker. I'll let you get your breath after getting that picture out of your head. Obviously we needed some stricter penalties when it came to distracted driving in the province, because in spite of the fact that we've brought in the fine, people were still talking on their phones while holding them in their hands. They were still texting while holding that phone in their hands.

I now have been converted, not because of the fines that have been coming from the other side, but just because I have a Bluetooth now, and it's much more convenient and safer for me to speak on my phone while driving with my Bluetooth on. It's not the penalties—and the penalties actually should be maybe even stiffer. We should have demerit points included in this as well.

1700

One of the parts that hasn't been mentioned, because we've been talking about climate change, is the fact that municipalities are actually going to benefit from this bill because they're going to be able to go out there and get millions and millions and millions of dollars that they haven't been able to collect in overdue Provincial Offences Act fines. In Hastings county alone—that would include the county, Belleville and Quinte West—there's over \$10 million in outstanding POA fines. After this bill is passed, they're going to be able to get their hands on that money and put it in the ground in much-needed infrastructure in their communities.

There's a lot of good things in this bill. We just didn't get to them in this debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for final comments.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the members from Thornhill, Niagara Falls, Trinity–Spadina and Prince Edward–Hastings for their comments.

The member from Prince Edward–Hastings made a very good contribution by reminding everybody about the very strong provisions here that will allow local municipalities to collect POA fines which they haven't been able to, which will be revenue they will be able to reinvest in infrastructure to make their roads and their streets safer.

The provisions in this bill around making cycling safer across Ontario are very important. The provisions in this bill about stronger fines for distracted driving, the provisions in this bill around changing some of the red tape around medically unfit drivers and their ability to get their licence back once they get medical clearance—those are all very important provisions in this bill.

Also the issue about impaired driving and giving law enforcement officials more tools to deal with people who are impaired not just by alcohol but by drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol—are very significant elements of this bill, which will benefit each and every person in this province, each and every day.

We did talk about some other issues. This bill contains so many important amendments to the Highway Traffic Act and the 407 act as well that will improve the safety on our roads and make it easier for Ontarians to pay their bills, retrieve their licences and have certainty that they can get home safely at the end of their day and that their kids will be safe on the streets of this province.

Again, I urge all members of the House to support Bill 31.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I'm now required to interrupt the

proceedings and announce that there has 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. James J. Bradley: My friend from Niagara Falls is going to be speaking next, so I'm going to let the debate continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakubuski: I've been to Niagara Falls, I'll say to the member from St. Catharines, but they've never offered to make me a resident. In fact, I would decline because living in Barry's Bay in good, old Renfrew county—there is no better place. I guess I'm a little biased on that, but I'll accept that.

Bill 31—I have to pick up a little bit on the comments from my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings: The environment minister, these days, all he wants to talk about is climate change. No matter what subject comes before the House, he's going to talk about climate change. I've heard some of the things he said about climate change in some of his travels, and I'm looking forward to bringing them up in this House for debate at some point because he has a tendency to just make these wild statements without any facts to back them up. He is passionate and he is committed but, at the same time, he tends to go off on a tangent and make these statements that cannot be verified.

He does say that he wants to get people out of cars, and I'd like to know what alternative he's proposing for my good folks in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. Todd Smith: Horses.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I suppose. Perhaps he doesn't know, but I know he has been to my riding—we don't have alternatives. Even in the most ambitious plans, there are no plans to extend the subway up to Renfrew county. There's not a lot of public transportation, but we do have roads.

It's my opportunity maybe to speak about something that I'm passionate about. Perhaps in this budget—we're getting closer, Speaker—the government will realize that it would be wise to extend the gas tax rebate to all municipalities, not just those that have a public transportation system. In places like Renfrew county, your roads and your streets and your highways—that is your public transportation system. It's very unfair that we continue to pay that gas tax without getting our fair share back.

A lot of people think that because the price of crude has dropped, the government's revenues from taxation have dropped. Yes, from HST, they have. But that was a tax, as you'll remember, that former Premier Dalton McGuinty imposed on the people of Ontario after saying he wouldn't. But then they imposed the HST.

You see, the provincial excise tax—14.7 cents—and the federal tax—10.5 cents, is it, or 10.6?—those are fixed rates on a litre of fuel. It has nothing to do with what the price of crude is.

I need to explain—this is all for those people out there who think that the government is losing their excise tax

because of the price of oil going down and the price of gas at the pump going down, although it has been going back up more recently. No, no; their money is safe. It's like money in the bank. They're going to keep on taking it from you just as long as you keep on paying it.

That excise tax is a portion of the tax that they currently rebate to municipalities that have a public transportation system. It has got nothing to do with the HST. It is the excise tax, the provincial portion, that they rebate to those municipalities that have a public transportation system.

What I'd like to see is all municipalities across Ontario get their fair share of it. I know that there are Liberal members over there that agree with me, but you see, they're afraid to speak out. Oh, yes, they're afraid to speak out because of the big powerful hand that comes out of the corner office on the second floor that says, "Sh. Zip it. Don't say a word."

I'm going to get to the bill. Bill 31: There are a lot of good things in this bill. I'm going to speak about some of them.

I think the one right off the top of my head—municipalities, and I'm speaking about municipalities in Renfrew county when I'm talking about the gas tax rebate, but also the Provincial Offences Act and the fines: This should have been done long ago. They levy fines against people for traffic offences, minor offences, Highway Traffic Act Offences—whatever—but then they don't pay, and the municipality is out that money because as part of the changes that were made under the previous government, I believe it was, those fines would go to the municipalities, not the provincial treasury. The county of Renfrew gets the money for provincial offences in my riding.

Those people who are delinquent—there's no mechanism to go after them. Well, this bill will provide that mechanism so that they will not be able to have their permits reissued if their fines are in arrears. That's a good thing. I'll give the government credit for that. I think that's very, very positive. Why should those people who get pinched on the highway and get a fine be the ones who have to pay the bills for those who don't? If you make a mistake and you're convicted or you plead guilty or whatever, you pay your fine. If everybody pays their fine, the requirement for the treasury will actually be less on a per-incident basis because they won't have to be dealing with the delinquents and the arrears, plus the efforts in trying to collect those fines after the fact.

1710

There are a number of things here for pedestrian safety, highway safety. I don't want to go into all of them because I probably won't have time. It's almost an omnibus bill. It's not that thick. It's not as thick as that report on the gas plants that on the government side said nothing today, but it is a comprehensive bill from the point of view that it touches on a lot of different issues.

But probably the one and almost maybe the driving issue of our day is distracted drivers. It is not speeding. While it will always be a scourge, even impaired driving

is not the terrible threat that it used to be. More and more people are getting to the point where they realize that you just don't drink and drive. Now, having said that, the RIDE program in my riding this year had some disappointing numbers. It's disappointing for all of us that everyone hasn't gotten the message. But today, one of the biggest fears is the number of people—because not everybody drinks and drives. In fact, it's a very small percentage of people. But almost everybody owns one of these. Almost everybody who owns a car or drives a car owns one of these.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Or two.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Or two or three. And the temptation is unbelievable sometimes, that if you hear that thing beep or you feel it vibrate, the temptation is to, as quickly as possible—because we live in this crazy social media world, there's this feeling that you have to respond immediately to every communication. So technology has driven us to distraction, no pun intended. Technology has driven us to distraction.

If everybody in this House, myself included, were to answer the question, "Have you looked at your BlackBerry, read an email, read a message or even responded to one and got your thumbs working while you were driving?", I think we might be shocked at the number of people who would respond yes. And, yes—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not I.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not Jim Bradley, because I don't even know if he owns one. But I'll say this complementarily, because Jim would actually be proud of it: Some might call him a Luddite.

Mr. Todd Smith: A Luddite?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes. That's an anti-technology guy. He's from the old days, you know?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Where are you from?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm from somewhere, but the debate is still raging.

And I would be guilty of that myself, Speaker. I would be guilty of that myself, so I'm not standing here sermonizing. I'm actually saying, "How big a problem is it?" I've done it myself. Should I be stopped while doing it, I would deserve the full force of the law.

Here we are. Even under this bill, the fine is going to rise to, I believe, \$1,000, which is a lot of money. But in every one of your ridings—well, some of you live in strictly urban ridings; it may not have happened. But if you live in a riding where there's an expanse of highway, you have read a story about people who were killed because the driver in one or both of the vehicles was found to be texting. They can determine that. Today, they can determine that. This is not something where the police say, "We believe the person may have been texting." No, they could take this BlackBerry, if I was involved in an accident, just like they've got the BlackBerry of David Livingston—not to go off topic, but they've got the BlackBerry of David Livingston, and they're going to find out some really good things out of that BlackBerry as well, but—

Hon. Michael Coteau: We're talking about safety and people's lives.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Michael, for getting me back on track.

They can take your BlackBerry and find an awful lot, even if you're no longer there to talk about it.

There are countless issues. There are some statistics to say that there are more people killed in accidents involving texting than there are alcohol-related collisions today. I am not for a moment saying that we should take any of the focus off impaired driving; absolutely not. Until there are no deaths from impaired driving, we must continue to focus on that. But this is a new phenomenon that didn't exist when they first came out with impaired-driving legislation and Breathalyzers and ways of determining what the blood alcohol level of a driver was.

We have to do something about this. Almost everyone owns one. If you have children and they're over the age of 16—maybe even younger. My youngest is 23. My children all have these. My wife has one; I've got one. We'd have to be living in some kind of a dream world to believe that neither myself nor any of them have ever inappropriately used that BlackBerry or—they don't have BlackBerrys; they've got something else.

Mr. Todd Smith: iPhones.

Mr. John Yakabuski: iPhones and Samsungs and whatever; I'll just say "BlackBerry" in a general sense—or to believe that they've never used it inappropriately while driving. If we don't do something to curb that, the carnage on our roads is only going to increase.

This bill begins to put more emphasis on it. It does it in a way that hits the pocketbook. There are demerit points, I believe, that are going to be attached to this as well. It's not in the bill but it will be in the regulations.

If someone has a fatal accident and they were impaired but they're not the casualty, we will socially ostracize that person for consciously doing something that was absolutely wrong, and we should. That is the right thing to do. We haven't reached that point with a driver who may cause an accident because they were texting or doing something else inappropriate with their handheld device—BlackBerry or otherwise. We're not there yet.

The numbers say that more people are being killed today because of texting and distracted driving than by impaired driving. Will this make the persons who are doing it the social pariahs that the impaired driver once was or still is today? Probably not, because we look at this still as a momentary lapse. They heard the thing go off and they thought—one of their kids had a big hockey tournament and maybe this was the email that said they won the gold first A division championship. Or whatever—"My boss said he might be in touch with me. We might have a big deal on the go." Well, there we go.

Without making the penalties severe, we will not reach that place where people accept that it is wrong. You have to put meat on the bone. I'll tell you how wrong it is, sir: It's \$1,000 and X number of demerit points wrong. That's what it is. Do you want to quantify this? It's no longer chicken feed. It's no longer pocket change. It's \$1,000 and X number of demerit points. And

we are going to have to make it clear to people that if you're going to be doing this, you will pay the price.

1720

Now, this has kind of been the—well, I'm trying to think of the word. I'm stuck for the word. But it has kind of been the catalyst to bring in this kind of legislation. But it is not the only form of distracted driving that we are becoming victim to. There are too many things that are taking people's attention away from what they should be doing when they are on the road.

What would you think if a doctor was performing surgery on you, Speaker, and they were getting down to the nitty-gritty, and he says, "Just hang on. I got a text from my wife. I'll be right with you"? Well, you wouldn't be very impressed, because he or she would be taking their attention away from a critical task, a critical task that in surgery, we would all accept, could be a matter of life and death.

So if you're on the highway, and you're in a machine a couple of tons, hurtling down the highway at 100-and-some kilometres an hour—well, we're going to stick to the speed limit for the time being.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Get up to 100, John.

Mr. John Yakubski: Let's just say 80 kilometres an hour—90 kilometres an hour on the Trans-Canada Highway; 90 kilometres an hour, two lanes, like it is through most of my riding, but I'm hopeful that the ministry is going to start to see the importance of extending that to four lanes. But you're hurtling down that highway at 90 kilometres an hour and someone else is hurtling down the highway in the opposite direction at 90 kilometres an hour. Even with my rudimentary math skills, I know that combined that's 180 kilometres an hour. You understand the energy of those two objects should they collide. Well, that's not something that is a matter of life and death? Absolutely. Absolutely, Speaker. Distracted driving is a matter of life and death.

I'm not in the habit—there are a few things in this bill that maybe I don't exactly like, but I haven't got all day. So I'm going to give the government credit. There will be amendments needed on it. I've read the bill, but I can't speak on it if you don't give me enough time.

But on this section of the bill, which I think—to me the most important asset we have is our youth: our children, our grandchildren—our youth. Because they will be the people who populate this place tomorrow, and they will be the people who lead us as we're old. So if we're not going to do something that guides them but also protects them, then we are not doing our job. Today, this is the beginning of doing our job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Comments and questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to stand in this House after our chilly winter break and be back up on my feet talking on behalf of residents of the great riding of Windsor–Tecumseh, especially following the very entertaining comments from my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I just want to touch on a couple of things that he talked about. He talked about the fine for distracted driving

going up to \$1,000, and that's a good thing. I just question the wisdom—if I make reference to what they are going to do with bicycles, they are going to require a head lamp on a bicycle, a reflector on the back. They are going to require reflective tape on the front spokes, reflective tape on the rear. Every person who contravenes this section is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not less than \$300 and not more than \$1,000. So, Speaker, they are going to treat bicycles—\$1,000 fine—as bad as a distracted-driving fine. So I think we can work on some things as the bill goes to committee for some improvements.

The member also talked about one of the greatest mysteries of all time: gas pricing. With the price of oil dropping by the barrel, you can drive past a gas station on the way to work and it's 85 cents; on the way home, it's 99.9; and three days later, it's back down to 80, then back up to 99. I don't get it. The price of oil hasn't changed in that time period but, in Ontario, there's all this gouging going on at the pump. I only mention that because the great member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke brought that up.

I do like the fact that municipalities will have the right to finally go after the provincial offences. Thank you for your time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was glad when you asked, Mr. Speaker, if the debate could continue. I, speaking on behalf of the government, said yes, of course it should continue because we had an excellent speech from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I thought it was one of his more positive speeches as well.

I did note that he deviated a bit from the content of the bill to begin with to talk about the gas tax. Of course he would know that it's two cents of the gas tax. If he were to pull it into every municipality in the province of Ontario, that would mean less for Belleville, less for Woodstock, less for St. Catharines, less for Peterborough, less for Niagara Falls and less for Brampton. How does the government overcome that? It has a special formula now for infrastructure purposes that helps rural Ontario, and I'm very supportive of that.

I want to say, as well, that when I was Minister of Transportation, we brought in the initial legislation on this. There was much apprehension and, in fact, some opposition to it, so the penalties were somewhat modest in those days. I contemplated at the time that eventually those would have to go up. First of all, there were no points to be lost if one violated it. As the member from Barry's Bay has said, the amount is rather modest in the present penalty regime. So I think it's most appropriate that we see the increased penalties for the very reasons that the member talked about.

I was pleased he was able to make his speech. I also wanted to hear the member for Niagara Falls, which is why, instead of cutting off debate, I wanted to ensure that the debate would continue because he will have some gems of wisdom, no doubt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments and questions?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to address a comment that my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke mentioned about the youth. Youth is the future of our great province and our great country. The youth have really been educated. The public awareness campaign against drinking and driving really came through to this generation that's in university and high school now. They designate a driver. They make alternate plans. They take public transit or taxis or get lifts. They figure it out, and there is zero tolerance for drinking and driving. What we need to do is, we need to work on the youth and educate them about the perils of distracted driving.

Distracted driving, I would remind everybody who's listening today, is not just about cellphones and smart phones. It's also about putting makeup on, eating and all the things that people are doing in their cars. Why? Because, too often, the commute has doubled for many people in the last couple of decades. They're spending way too much time in their cars. They're treating it like an office or a part of their home. We have to educate the kids to really keep an eye on their parents. I know that when I've gone through the left turn—you're waiting for the left turn and sometimes it's red already by the time you're making a left turn—my kids were never very happy with that when I was driving. I used to try to explain that when you are trying to make a left turn, it's so tricky.

It's the same thing with kids watching their parents in terms of drinking and driving. I think we could bring the kids on board, and maybe we need some kind of public awareness campaign about distracted driving, and include everything in that. The focus, again, has to be on what we can do to cut down on the commute because we all know that the longer you're in the car, the more dangerous it is and the more likely people are to do something that will distract them from the task at hand.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: One of the things that was brought up earlier in the debate was that this bill was a combination of a number of ideas and input from various members. I think that's something that we would like to see more of, the fact that we can all work together towards sometimes a common vision. In this bill, there are some components that I think we've done a tremendous amount of good work on, particularly when it comes to some of the cycling initiatives. I'm an avid cyclist, and I think it's important that we encourage it. Obviously, depending on where you are in the province and what type of infrastructure you have, it may not be the only or the best solution for various residents across the province, but in certain areas it's an amazing alternative to driving. It's something we need to encourage and support, and the more we support it and encourage it, the more people will actually cycle.

Major cities across the world have turned towards cycling as a great activity to encourage exercise and to

encourage people to get out and be active, and it is also a great way to reduce congestion. It's often one of the quickest ways to get around, and it's an important tool in addressing not only climate change but also the fact that, as a society, we're seeing more and more sedentary lifestyles leaving an impact in terms of people's health. It's certainly something that can assist in a wide variety of forums or fields.

Distracted driving: We've talked about it, and we're all in agreement that there is certainly behaviour that is dangerous on the road. There are certain things that people are doing when they're driving that put them at a higher risk for accidents. Obviously, whatever we can do to discourage those types of activities would be great. I think it's important for us to take that initiative and ensure that, whether through education or through various forms of legislation, we make sure that our roads are as safe as possible.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to add my voice to this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Back to the member for a final response.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members for Windsor–Tecumseh, St. Catharines, Thornhill and Bramalea–Gore–Malton for their comments today. I did want to just touch on the comments of the member for St. Catharines on the gas tax rebate. Whether or not a municipality would lose as a result of that is entirely up to the government's policy. There are many, many ways in which you can fund municipalities. It doesn't mean for one second that, if further municipalities receive a portion of the gas tax, other municipalities wouldn't be funded in some other way for their public transportation system. I just wanted to clarify that, because that's a government policy issue that is far deeper than just trying to pigeonhole that one item.

But again, I'm trying to be positive today on some of the initiatives that the government has brought forward. I spoke briefly about two of them today, one being the scourge of distracted driving, on which I think we all need to be vigilant and diligent in our commitment to ensure that we try to convince everyone that this is the wrong thing to do. Not only could you endanger yourself, but you could endanger the lives of many, many others.

The other thing I touched on and want to reiterate again is how important it is for municipalities such as mine in Renfrew county that there be more of a penalty for those people who are delinquent in paying their Highway Traffic Act provincial offences fines that are currently submitted to the municipality. By having this in the bill, which will penalize those people—they won't be able to get a permit—this will help municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member. Further debate.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for allowing me to speak on this quite extensive bill here today. As you can see, Bill 31 combines a number of previous bills into one bill, so I'll work through some of the ideas presented here. I believe the general idea and the spirit of the bill is

captured in its title—legislation to make Ontario roads safer.

As many of you know, the riding of Niagara Falls is a major border crossing, connecting both Fort Erie and Niagara Falls to New York state at a number of crossings. For decades, these have been some of the busiest borders in Canada and have solidified the deep trading partnership between us and our neighbours to the south.

Keeping this province's roads safe and clear is a priority for both myself and the people of my riding. We have so many jobs in Niagara that depend on this transportation: jobs in the auto sector, the tourism sector, the winemaking sector and the farming sector. Making sure that these businesses can function smoothly by keeping our roads safe and clear is necessary to protect jobs in Niagara and across the province of Ontario.

Let's talk about distracted driving. The first part of this bill addresses some things that are becoming a major problem on our roads. I want to say one point clearly. I'm sure many of you have already heard it, but it's important that we say it again: According to the OPP, distracted drivers have become the number one killer—number one—on our roads here in Ontario. When the people who live in this province are put in harm's way because of distracted drivers, then the members in this House have an obligation to act.

Cellphone technology is advancing at a rapid pace, and we need to make sure that our laws are keeping up with that progress. This involves two things: making sure the proper fines are in place and making sure that the right education is available. Currently, the range of fines for driving distracted is \$60 to \$500. This bill seeks to increase it to from \$300 to \$1,000 plus three demerit points on a licence, which is important, for anyone caught driving while distracted. These fines are acceptable because, like I mentioned, this has become the most dangerous thing occurring on our roads.

We can't just slap these fines on people if they don't understand the issue fully. Yes, hefty fines can act as a deterrent, but there are organizations out there that are really trying to get people to understand how dangerous distracted driving is. CAA is a great example. CAA are the ones who do the studies and tell us things like the fact that drivers engaged in text messaging and on cellphones are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or a near-crash event compared with non-distracted drivers, and that international research shows that 20% to 30% of all collisions involve distracted drivers. Mr. Speaker, these are incredibly important statistics. We need to make sure that this legislation works with their efforts to educate people on the dangers and adequately punish those who ignore the signs.

There are opportunities to work with our institutions and with our schools to make this happen, either at the elementary or high school level or at university or college, like Brock University and Niagara College in my riding.

I can remember when seat belts—and I think we all can remember; there's a lot of people here today—were

first introduced. No one followed the rules, and they didn't wear them or weren't really concerned about why they were so important. Over time, this notion began to change. People began to see the importance and understand why seat belts were necessary. Nowadays, you never see someone get into a car with their children and not put on the seat belt; it's unheard of.

Sometimes people find it's so easy to justify using cellphones really quickly on the road or just sending one- or two-word texts or reading a quick response. But we need to do with cellphones what we did with seat belts. Distracted drivers are putting thousands of people at risk every day. If these fines will help end that, then so be it.

But I don't think we should just up the fines and assume the problem will take care of itself. Yes, some people may put down the cellphone, knowing how bad these fines are. But you also need to work on education. This government and every member in this House need to work on making sure people understand how unsafe distracted driving is and how important it is to work together.

I know I've only got 10 minutes on this, so I'll go to another part. But I want to say how important that is to my 17-year-old daughter, Jacqueline, who just started driving. She just got her licence, and we spent a lot of time talking to her about the importance of making sure that both hands are on the wheel and she's driving safely. All of us have to understand that.

1740

I'll go to the second part because, like I said, I'm cutting short on time here. In the interests of time, I'm only going to touch on one other part of this bill—which, like I said, is very lengthy and contains many changes—and that is the changes to the Highway 407 East Act. Of course, we all know that the 407 was opened in 1997 and in 1999 was leased to a private operator so the Conservative government at the time could use that money in their budget. In 2013, the over \$800 million the 407 made went to a private company instead of to the people of this province.

In 2012, the Ontario government enacted the Highway 407 East Act, which will govern the extension of the 407 when completed. This project is a P3, operated and maintained by, for the most part—which is concerning—the same private companies that currently operate the 407. So what we see is that the Conservatives opted to make the 407 private and that the Liberals are dealing with the same private owners today.

Here's the problem that we have with this: For the most part, the 407 is becoming a highway for the well-off. To drive on the 407 costs someone a car payment these days. Not only does the money not go back into the hands of the people in this province, but they are being excluded from even using the highway.

Under Bill 31, the registrar of motor vehicles no longer has to notify people that their plates will not be renewed 30 days before the licence plate renewal is necessary—and I really want everybody, all these parties, to listen to this, because this is a real issue—should

people have an outstanding ETR bill. That would be okay in a perfect world, where everyone knew exactly how much they owed to the ETR and when they had to pay. I wish this bill would address some of the larger issues posed by the 407 billing, but for now we just have to discuss the change.

We hear the strangest stories about 407 bills today. We hear things where they'll presume the person received the bill, and when they forget about it for a while—years later, they come back and think about it, and with all the compound interest and fees, they say you have to pay an amount that sometimes is 40 times higher than the original bill. I'd like to point out that the annual interest rate of a 407 bill is 25%—25%. So if you didn't receive an invoice, or you did receive one and easily forgot, you could be in a lot of trouble somewhere down the road.

Mr. Speaker, we hear crazy cases where deceased spouses are still having their bills handed off to their loved ones. So imagine now: You're a single person working hard to support yourself and your family, and along comes this bill. Maybe you were in a rush one day and you had to take the 407, or maybe the QEW was congested because of how much traffic was on it, and you needed to get to Toronto.

I'm trying to get this all in. Why would we not want to discuss these toll fees publicly? Now when you're going to raise the fees, in this bill, it says here that there doesn't have to be any public consultation. I don't think we should do that. I'm hoping that when we get to committee, we can say, "Listen, that might not make a lot of sense, because we have to serve the public." I'm not sure that removing them from any debate over toll fees is the best thing to do.

While the official explanation is that it gives the Ministry of Transportation the ability to increase the fees based on inflation, unfortunately, that's not the only power that they get with this sort of legislation. If it was just put into the bill where they could just raise it by the rate of inflation with no consultation, maybe you could have some really earnest discussion around that. But that's not what they're saying. They're saying no; they can raise it up to inflation, but they can also raise it more. To me, that doesn't make any sense. Like I said, driving on the 407 is very expensive.

I'll finish off because I've only got five seconds left. However, I'd like to say, especially around the 407 changes, that there need to be some changes made in committee.

I want to thank my good friend from St. Catharines, Mr. Bradley, for giving me the opportunity to prolong the debate and letting me speak. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Niagara Falls.

Questions and comments? The deputy government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm glad to respond to the member's excellent speech. It's very hard to get into 10 minutes all the information that you'd like to, but he touched on many interesting aspects.

One was Highway 407. If you ever wanted to hear—you know how they use the word "scandal" every time you turn around now? There was a scandal, because you will recall that it was worth about \$10 billion. Because they wanted to show a balanced budget in the year 1999—some history on this—they sold it at a fire sale for \$3 billion. Not only that, but it was a sweetheart deal because the company that owns it now can raise the price anytime they want.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: For 99 years.

Hon. James J. Bradley: For 99 years. I can understand the member's consternation at this.

You'll say, "Where are the emails over that? Where's the information?" When the government left office in 2003, the shredders were burning out as they were shredding all the government material at that time. That was allowed. The same people who are now complaining about deletions deleted everything. They just put it in the shredder. They backed the shredders up, and out everything went.

The member mentioned, earlier in the day—and he wanted to get this in his speech—GO Transit. What he recognized, and what I think a lot of people recognize now, is that the cat got the tongues of all the Conservatives in our area when Via Rail ended its service. We used to have—he made reference to it earlier—an outstanding Via Rail service, and it disappeared. CKTB wasn't going to come to Ottawa to have a special program. There weren't resolutions passed. Nothing happened. The Tories were all silent when Via Rail disappeared from St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the deputy government House leader for that interesting piece of history and move over to further questions and comments.

Mr. Todd Smith: "Selective memory" is all I can say. Selective memory. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker: The member opposite doesn't carry a BlackBerry but he remembers his talking points from 12 years ago like it was yesterday. It's a remarkable thing.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's 99 years.

Mr. Todd Smith: He's 99 years old?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: The lease is 99 years.

Mr. Todd Smith: Oh, I thought you said he was 99 years old. I'm so sorry. He's not quite that old yet.

Let's go back to the remarks of the member from Niagara Falls. They were excellent remarks, although he was trying to get as much as he possibly could in there and I don't think he ever did actually get to the Via discussion which he mentioned earlier this afternoon.

When it comes to the distracted driving portion of this piece of legislation, I think we all agree that we are headed in the right direction with this piece of legislation when it comes to educating the people of Ontario about the dangers of distracted driving and increasing the penalties to make it a far more expensive proposition to get caught holding onto a hand-held device while driving in this province.

There has been a public relations campaign that has been going on. You'll see the little red stop signs on the

backs of vehicles along our highways: “Stop Texting”; “No Texting”; “Don’t Text and Drive.” These types of magnets are on the backs of vehicles, and I think they eventually are having the same effect.

The member from the third party was talking about the seat belt legislation that came in. I can tell you that as soon as I get in a vehicle right now, when my 12-year-old daughter is in the back seat, before I even put the car in gear: “Get your seat belt on, Dad.” She knows about not drinking and driving. She knows about texting and driving and the dangers of it. So our young people are educated on this. I think what we have to do is take these smart phones, stick them in the glove compartment when you get in the vehicle and then take them out of the glove compartment when you get out. Definitely a public relations campaign can go a long way to end distracted driving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I’d like to comment on my good friend from Niagara Falls, who was prepared for 20 minutes and cut down to 10 this afternoon—but if I can begin by speaking to the member from St. Catharines who talked about Highway 407 and the scandal that was involved when it was sold off by a former Conservative government.

1750

Earlier today, the Minister of Agriculture called it the biggest scandal of the 20th century. The deputy House leader, the minister without portfolio, just said that part of that scandal was that they allowed the operators of the highway to raise the toll rates any time they wanted—big scandal. What bothers me, and it should bother every one of us on all sides of the House, is that there used to be a thing in this bill, and this minister has taken it out, that said on an annual review the public will be consulted on any annual increase. They’re taking it out. Now there’s a scandal unto itself. They’re taking it out. You should be able to talk about a rate increase on Highway 407. They’re taking it out, and I don’t know why. Maybe at some point, we’ll hear about that.

They used to apply a second notice: If you get a bill, and you don’t pay, they give you a reminder. They’re taking that out. They don’t have to give you a second reminder any more. How many of us have heard about somebody who got a bill for driving on the 407 when they were parked in a driveway in Windsor, Waterloo or Wawa? They weren’t on the 407. The plate readers aren’t 100% accurate. Now you don’t even get a reminder to say, “What is this? I’ve got to check into this.” You go to renew your plate, and you can’t do it, and your car wasn’t there. So this has to be changed.

You still need to consult the public in an open, transparent government—to consult on any annual rate increase.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It’s a pleasure to add my comments on the member from Niagara Falls. I listened to him, and

I listened to the previous speaker as well. It’s not very often that we have some general consensus of where this thing’s going, and that’s a good thing. But realizing that it’s been here a number of times before with different faces, different versions—I think as we do this, we learn.

I was here in my previous life when I think Minister Bradley—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Previous life?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, you know, John; here.

Interjection: Reincarnated.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Reincarnated.

We started going down this path, we learned, and we’re making improvements to the piece.

But let me focus, in just the minute I’ve got left, on allowing municipalities extra powers to collect from the Provincial Offences Act. I’m not sure who in this House remembers—certainly I was the mayor of Brighton at that time—when the former government did an awful lot of downloading, and to please the municipalities of the day, they said, “We’re going to give you this.” It didn’t even come close, Speaker, but they had some hope, and—well, I was going to use a word that I’m sure will be called unparliamentary. The municipalities really got done in. That was the legislation, the omnibus bill, who does what to who and who gets the worst of it. So we’ve been trying to get this through, Speaker, to give those municipalities the much-needed revenue they have been asking for. Frankly, it was entitled to them.

So I really look forward, at the end of this debate, to making sure we get this passed. Yes, we’ve talked about amendments, but there are some that are so necessary to get done. I know every municipal leader I speak to really wants to see this happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Niagara Falls for final comments.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks very much for everybody’s comments—my colleagues’.

I want to talk real quick in my two minutes because I had a few other things I’d like to talk about. I talked a little bit about the texting that we saw. I was driving home last Friday; I left here around 3 or 10 after 3. Again, it was just lucky, I guess, that my good friend Mr. Bradley was on the highway I was at the same time. I left Toronto to go home to spend time with my family, and it took me three hours to get home. The highway was packed. Mr. Bradley, who’s been here for—I don’t know—40 years, can remember when it used to take an hour or an hour and 15 minutes to go to St. Catharines and to Niagara Falls. The problem we have today is that 50,000 commuters are coming from Niagara Falls to Toronto. Where it used to be backed up maybe just to Oakville, it’s now backed up at all the way into Niagara.

We’re talking about safe roads and making sure they’re safe, and we had the Minister of the Environment talking about, “We’ve got to get people out of our cars.” What better way to do it than to have two-way GO all the way to Niagara Falls, all the way to St. Catharines? That’s how you do it.

I want to say to my colleagues in the Liberal government, you have to deliver on that. If we want to fix our

roads, make them safer, make sure our businesses, our industry, our wine industry, our farmers, are going to be competitive, we've got to clear the congestion off the highway. The way to do that—and I know my colleague has said it in his re-election—we're going to bring GO to Niagara. Let's just get it done. Let's get it done as quick as possible, and we can work together on that to make sure that our roads are safe for our kids and our grand-kids.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Monsieur le Président, c'est un plaisir de m'adresser à vous en ce début d'année.

It's a pleasure to address you and wish you first and foremost a happy new year. I know we're in February, but it's the first time that I'm sitting in this House—

Interjection: Chinese New Year.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Chinese New Year. Happy Chinese New Year.

I'm very proud of what Ontario has been doing for the past 13 years, ranking first and second in North America on our road safety. Our government is very proud of our record of having among the safest roads here in North America.

It gives me great pleasure to talk about Bill 31, and I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Ottawa South today.

Interjection.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The little bit left. We'll share it by Thursday, guys.

One thing that I heard a lot today is how much we have evolved when it comes to how far we have come along; I think somebody was mentioning that not too long ago, my grandfather—we were able to drive and drink in our vehicles. You were able to get in your vehicle without a safety—

Interjection: Seat belt.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: A seat belt. Thank you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have laws and new enforcement, and I would like to say that now technology is part of our every day. I heard the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke talking about our cellphones. We sometimes have one, two—

Interjection: Three.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: —and a colleague of yours says three cellphones. So technology has changed

our world. Technology has made us feel almost obsessed with the word “busy.” Multi-tasking is also a common practice.

When I talk to my colleagues and friends and family, most of the time people say, “How are you?” and everybody says, “I'm busy.” So I'm going to reflect back and think that when you are driving, the main focus should be on the road. There are too many issues and uncontrollable environments, parts of our environment that reflect on how, potentially, not focusing on the road can harm you.

One thing that's important, Mr. Speaker, is that when we're driving, we are responsible for ourselves, but also for the lives of others. For me, when you think about driving, you should definitely focus your full attention on the driving section.

I was talking with my colleague, and we were talking—when we're driving, we are almost—and I say “almost,” and I'll put it in quotes—a potential weapon of 2,000—

Interjection.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Of 2,500 pounds—

Interjection.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, you're telling me I need to wrap up. Is that what you're saying?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): One minute.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: One minute left?

Interjection.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: One minute left. Ah, I see. Okay. Thank you.

So, unfortunately, that weapon that's in our hand is definitely something that we have to focus. I'm very happy to see that our government is taking action in improving the safety of our roads. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I apologize for having to interrupt the speaker from Ottawa–Orléans, but the time for debate today has come to an end.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): You will be permitted—and your designate—to continue debate at a better time, but since it is now 6 o'clock, this Legislature stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiques, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bas Balkissoon, Chris Ballard
Grant Crack, Han Dong
Cindy Forster, Michael Harris
Randy Hillier, Sophie Kiwala
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Laura Albanese, Yvan Baker
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Ann Hoggarth, Monte McNaughton
Peter Z. Milczyn, Daiene Vernile
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Eleanor McMahon, Lisa M. Thompson
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Fraser
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Wayne Gates, Marie-France Lalonde
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Jim McDonell, Randy Pettapiece
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Toby Barrett
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Toby Barrett
Garfield Dunlop, Eleanor McMahon
Laurie Scott, Jagmeet Singh
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Robert Bailey, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Jennifer K. French, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, France Gélinas
Marie-France Lalonde, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Kathryn McGarry
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère
sexuel**

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
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