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Wednesday 1 April 2015

Mercredi 1^{er} avril 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1^{er} avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES
ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR DES CHOIX
PLUS SAINS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 30, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2015 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2015 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à améliorer la santé publique par l'édiction de la Loi de 2015 pour des choix santé dans les menus et de la Loi de 2015 sur les cigarettes électroniques et la modification de la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to speak on Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. As I understand it, this bill, if passed, contains measures that will enact healthy menu choices, amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and enact the Electronic Cigarettes Act. This is an important bill, as it will impact so many areas of people's lives, which my caucus and I believe will be for the better.

I want to look at schedule 2 of the bill, which addresses the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Adults have the ability to choose for themselves what vices they partake of; however, we have seen an alarming trend toward flavoured tobacco and its packaging and promotion. I have seen for myself tobacco products that have been branded and packaged to resemble candy more than tobacco. As a parent and grandparent, I find this practice very disturbing. Tobacco companies are not playing fair with our children. It has been a long, uphill battle to educate people on the harmful effects of smoking. While we felt we were making progress by raising awareness, tobacco companies were one step ahead and already lining up their next generation of customers.

Moreover, tobacco companies felt that pretty packaging wasn't sufficient and started promotional campaigns to make their product even more appealing. So I'm happy to see this government, at the urging of the NDP critic,

take action on this by including a provision that prohibits the sale of tobacco products with promotional items. They have expressed their intent to ensure that any promotional product must, at a minimum, be sold at the cost of manufacturing.

The hidden reality of this schedule is that once again the government has empowered itself with tremendous leeway over which flavoured products will be banned. My offices have received emails from constituents who are asking for the ban on menthol cigarettes to be lifted. The government has flipped, or rather flopped, on this issue by offering a two-year exemption on the ban against menthol cigarettes, which I suggest will provide tobacco companies with a two-year window to figure out new and creative ways of targeting Ontario's young people.

All the research suggests that menthol cigarettes could be worse for health than regular tobacco, with studies linking them to even more severe lung problems. It was further reported that menthol smokers report more trips to the emergency room than non-menthol smokers, were hospitalized more frequently for worsening of their lung disease, and had 29% higher risk of being hospitalized. Other studies cite that young menthol smokers consume double the tobacco than those smoking conventional cigarettes.

Speaker, these are very worrisome numbers, and the consequences of smoking menthol cigarettes seem to be greater. The facts are clear: Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death and illness in Ontario. According to the Ontario Lung Association, there are approximately 13,000 tobacco-related deaths every year in Ontario—that's 36 deaths per day. They also cite that tobacco-related diseases cost the Ontario economy at least \$1.6 billion in health care annually, resulting in more than \$4.4 billion in productivity losses, and account for at least 500,000 hospital stays each year.

Tobacco use and the exposure to second-hand smoke is also linked to serious damage in children including asthma attacks, alterations in lung development and chronic middle ear disease. So the facts show us that we have an uphill battle to help educate our children about the dangers of smoking or chewing tobacco, and I am eager to see some real movement on this issue.

Speaker, the fact of this matter is that youth are impressionable. They have always been and always will be. To dismiss this phenomenon about teenagers would simply be naive. However, it is very concerning that there are currently no age restrictions on purchasing e-cigarettes nor are there restrictions on the marketing and promotion of them, of which the tobacco industry has taken

full advantage. In fact, since the introduction of electronic cigarettes and vapour, Ontario's youth have been at the core of the marketing of these products. In 2103 alone, 15% of Ontario youth said they have used e-cigarettes.

Not only are e-cigarettes and vapour attractive to youth, they are falsely portrayed as safe, nicotine-free and an effective smoking cessation aid. However, these beliefs couldn't be further from the truth.

Lacking regulation both provincially and federally, e-cigarettes and vapour products are not subject to quality and manufacturing standards set forth under the Canada Food and Drugs Act. Just as conventional cigarettes are subject to consumer safety standards, vapour and e-cigarette products should be as well, because in actuality not all consumers of these products know what they are inhaling and what they are taking in.

Furthermore, this lack of oversight in ingredient disclosure and labeling sets a dangerous precedent. A long-held falsehood about e-cigarettes is that they are nicotine-free, which in conventional cigarettes is what makes cigarettes so addictive. While nicotine cannot technically be sold or marketed in Canada—the fact of the matter is that they are readily available on the Internet.

Additionally, studies have shown that the labeling of these products is misguided. In many cases there have been findings of nicotine in products that are labeled as nicotine-free. Not only is this a questionable business practice, but it is also dangerous. These products are perceived as safe and as an alternative to smoking, or even the means to quit smoking altogether. Because of this practice, a relatively new one, more and more studies are coming forth to disprove this belief. In fact, to this day there is no strong evidence to suggest that these products curb smoking at all.

Lastly, Speaker, on smoking, I would just want to note that while I respect an adult to make their own choices, I do want to remind everyone that we are all role models for the children in our communities. The more attractive we make poor health choices appear, the more likely they are to emulate us.

That's the part of smoking that I think is really important. Health issues are complex: From food to exercise to what we use as—like smoking or drinking. But smoking, in particular, has devastating effects on people's health, and the next generations that's up and coming needs to be educated about the new products that are coming onto the market. When we talk about the flavoured cigarettes, they're out there right now. Youth think they're the in thing to do; it's cool.

0910

I mentioned before in the House that I had met with the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation and how their representative had a lip gloss container and it was empty. It was the actual same size as the flavoured cigarette. It looked like candy and it was all designed and colourful. If my daughter or my son had that flavoured cigarette in their backpack, I would think they were wearing lip gloss. I wouldn't have a clue that might be an e-cigarette. Parents also have to be up to date on what products are

out there when it comes to smoking, when their children are at risk.

The other piece I want to talk about is the healthy food act part of it, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I might be able to talk about this in my supplementary a little further. There a many people in my riding who contact my office, and I meet every day, who are under-employed. They have precarious employment. They're working for minimum wage and they are just scraping by. Oftentimes they're just concerned about food security and how to make healthy choices every day in their diet. Just the issue of affordability of everyday food—when people go out to eat, that's a privilege. Not everyone has that room in their budget to go out and have a dinner at a restaurant. I do applaud the fact that when people are going out to eat in restaurants, we're going to have menu labelling and there's going to be awareness and education so people can make healthier choices. But we forget that for the people who are working who can't even squeeze a night out in a restaurant out of their budget, that food security is real every day for them.

I'm happy to see that this bill has finally come forward. I know that our health critic from Nickel Belt has been working very hard, and so thank you to the government for recognizing the work that's been done on this and bringing it forward and working together with all groups to try to make this a good bill. I hope that when we hear more debate, I look forward to this bill being passed when it comes to that time. That the real work, again, will be done in committee to strengthen this bill—and particularly the smoking section would be a great step forward, to see that happening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe. I agree with you: This is basically a non-partisan issue. We need to get this bill passed.

We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults. In my former occupation as a kindergarten teacher, quite often you would see children who were coming in who were already overweight and physically not able to keep up with the others in physical education classes.

A healthy start is better for our kids and it's better for our health care system. The healthier our kids are, the less likely they are to develop a chronic disease later in life. Diabetes is increasing very quickly. Diabetes is becoming more prevalent, especially in young children, and I think this bill is very important to help curb that. That's why the Ontario government constructed the Healthy Kids Panel. They provided us with invaluable advice and we are moving forward on many of the panel's recommendations, including around healthy eating choices for our kids.

In kindergarten, we checked the children's lunch boxes and encouraged them to eat the fruits and vegetables and healthy choices in their lunches before they ate the Oreo cookie.

In order for our parents and children to make healthy choices, though, they need to be informed about the kind

of food they are eating. The Ontario government has re-introduced legislation which will make it easier for families to make informed and healthy food choices and give them the right information in the right place at the right time. These initiatives build on the steps we have taken to give our kids a healthy start, which will include new investments in breastfeeding supports and additional investments in the Ontario Student Nutrition Program. I urge you to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I support this bill because it is aimed at improving people's health, and the most important part is probably aimed at improving children's health. We have a situation—especially on the smoking side with flavoured cigarettes—where that campaign is pretty clearly aimed at children and trying to introduce them or entice them into the habit of smoking with these candy-flavoured e-cigarettes. I've seen the packaging—the Heart and Stroke people were into my office and explained to me the risks and dangers of this. The packaging makes it look like candy. It's not aimed at adults who smoke.

Adults who smoke are most likely going to smoke cigarettes—menthol-flavoured, perhaps, which has been around for 70 years—or even e-cigarettes, which I understand do help some people wean themselves from the habit of smoking regular cigarettes. So we need to ban flavoured tobacco e-cigarettes because they are a risk in encouraging children to smoke, which is a terrible habit that can be a lifelong addiction, and that does great damage to people's health for all the reasons that are pretty well known.

Now, one of the side effects of the regulations in this bill is that by increasing more regulations for e-cigarettes and even banning the flavoured ones, it's going to drive people to the illegal cigarette market, which is run by the natives of Ontario, and that is criminal. That is against the law. It's a contraband product, and as we make it more and more difficult for people to buy cigarette products off the store shelves, we drive them to the illegal, contraband, native Indian market of illegal cigarettes, where there is absolutely no control: We have no idea what kind of products are going into the cigarettes, and of course there's no tax for the government either.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker, and Happy Pink Shirt Day today.

I'm pleased to be able to stand in my place and comment on G45. I always say, when I stand up to speak to this bill, that the "G" really stands for Gélinas. France Gélinas, the member from Nickel Belt, has presented this House with 11 bills over the past six years dealing with menu labelling and restrictions on tobacco. It really is a team effort, Speaker, as has been mentioned: It will take all of us to improve this legislation and pass it into law.

I have good friends in Kentucky. One of my buddies down there smokes cigars. There was a crackdown in Kentucky, and he couldn't get the flavoured tobacco he

used to smoke. He called me up and was looking for it up here. Well, I couldn't find it up here for him either. He had to settle for some Cubans that he couldn't get down in Kentucky.

I mention my buddy—he lives just outside of Fort Knox, in a town called Vine Grove, and owns a golf course there, Lincoln Trail. His brother and his sister-in-law don't smoke cigars, but they chew tobacco. I always got a kick out of that, because they have these paper cups with paper towels in them, and they look like they're taking a sip, but they're just spitting the tobacco juice into the cup.

Once—I guess it was in grade 9 in New Brunswick, grade 9 or 10—somebody slipped me a little piece of chewing tobacco. The teacher said, "Hatfield, what are you doing? What are you eating?" So I swallowed it, and I've never touched it since. If you've ever swallowed chewing tobacco, Speaker, you'll know what I'm talking about. It was a good thing it was science lab and there was a sink there, but I'll tell you, I'll never try that stuff again. I don't smoke, and I don't encourage people to smoke or to chew tobacco.

And happy Pink Shirt Day, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister for Children and Youth Services and women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: If I may just indulge for one minute and say it could also be Pink Skirt Day. I would say to my wonderful colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh: Pink Skirt Day or Pink Scarf Day, I think, can work well with Pink Shirt Day. It's all for a good cause.

Speaker, I'm pretty excited about this bill, Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, probably for three reasons.

First, I am the Minister of Children and Youth Services, so I'm always interested in and supportive of anything that helps support kids and youth make healthier choices and have healthier outcomes in their lives.

Secondly, I am a mom of two kids. They're teenagers now, so, since I've been in the Legislature for almost four years, I have to adjust my thinking. I don't have young kids anymore; I have teenagers. Nevertheless, I look at many things through the eyes of my kids, and I think this bill really speaks to what I feel is important as a mother. I think we all want the same thing as parents and caregivers: to see our kids make healthier choices.

0920

The third reason I'm excited about this bill is because I sense there is agreement amongst all the parties that this is the right thing to do. Perhaps some things need to be looked at in further detail in regulation. However, I think it's a great bill, and I'm sensing a lot of support around the House for that, so that's excellent.

Whether we're talking about tobacco products—and I think the bill speaks to the research there, and there's new research particularly on the menthol piece, which is why we're proposing to include it in the ban—the e-cigarettes element of it or the menu labelling, I think it's all good, Speaker. I'm absolutely thrilled that there seems to be consensus and support across the board.

Thank you, and happy Pink Day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from London—Fanshawe has two minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member from Barrie mentioned child obesity, and that is something that is on the rise. Our lifestyles have changed over hundreds and thousands of years. The lifestyle challenge that we're facing today is processed food. People eat processed food every day in their diet. Some people eat it because they are in a hurry; they're busy, busy people. Some people don't have the time to create those healthy meals. That does lead to problems.

It leads to patterns of behaviour; again we're influencing and showing our children our eating patterns, so it's not a surprise that our children today are facing issues of weight. They're also on the computer more—social media—they're also playing video games, and they're not as active. So we do have to make a concerted effort in our school systems and at home.

Even when we're parking our cars—when we talk about exercise is where I'm going. When you're going to the store with your child, to the grocery store, don't complain about the parking spot that isn't close to the store. Just park in the back. Park in the back and then just walk to the grocery store or wherever you're going to do your shopping. Make it part of something you do every day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Changing your own behaviour will maybe reflect on your peers and even your colleagues here in the House and your children.

There's one thing I saw in the news today, Speaker, that there are communities taking a lot of initiative when it comes to healthy food choices.

Oh gosh, I'm out of time. Maybe I'll talk to that later in another comments and questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to see you this morning and to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2014 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2014 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. This bill has three schedules.

Maybe I'll start with schedule 2, which is the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. "The sale of promotional items together with tobacco products is prohibited." I don't have a problem with that. "The sale of flavoured tobacco products is prohibited...." As other members have talked about, these flavoured tobacco products are used to entice our youth to smoke and are used as a gateway product to get them hooked on smoking, and then, of course, they end up with an addiction to it. So I don't have a problem with that.

I did meet with the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association, and certainly tobacco products are a big part of their business. As long as they're legal, they want to look out for that a little bit, I guess. They had problems with the ban on menthol cigarettes, pointing out that pretty much all menthol cigarettes are legally purchased now. Their concern is the unintended consequence that, if they're banned from legal outlets, it will be a new busi-

ness for the contraband market in the province of Ontario. That does seem to make some sense. I do wonder whether menthol cigarettes are like the other flavoured tobacco products—really a gateway product. I'm not a smoker, but I wouldn't think that they really are. So I think there is some sense in what they're pointing out.

Obviously, as a province we should be doing all we can to reduce smoking for all the health reasons etc.—costs to the health system, people's lives—but we're not really addressing the issue if we don't also address contraband cigarettes. We haven't done a very good job in the province of Ontario of addressing contraband cigarettes. I believe 40% to 50% of cigarettes sold in this province are contraband.

The Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association pointed out that Quebec is doing a much better job. They passed Bill 59 a few years back, and saw the contraband percentage go from 48% down to 18% in just three years. So it seems to me that we could learn from whatever they're doing in Quebec. One of the differences, they explained to me, was that if you're caught with contraband in Quebec, they can seize your car, much like in hunting. If you're doing something illegal in hunting, a conservation officer in Ontario can seize various things. That would probably be quite a deterrent from people wanting to use contraband cigarettes. It seems to have been effective in Quebec.

They also raised the question of, if you're underage, you can't buy cigarettes but you can smoke them legally in Ontario, so why not ban underage smoking and make it at least a ticketable offence? I think that makes sense. It probably would get rid of the groups of kids outside of our schools in the smoking section, if they knew they were going to get a \$50 ticket, like a speeding ticket, for underage smoking. If you can't buy them, why would it be legal to smoke them? These are some suggestions that I think would be more effective if the government's goal is to reduce smoking eventually to zero in the province of Ontario.

Now schedule 3 in this legislation has to do with e-cigarettes. I must admit, I'm a little conflicted on that one because you hear stories—I've had people writing to me about the benefits of e-cigarettes, in that those people want to use it as a way to stop smoking or greatly reduce their smoking if they substitute e-cigarettes for regular cigarettes.

I think some of the unknown factors are, just what is in the vaping products? I was asking some of the other members if they knew who regulates that. I gather it's unregulated. Really, it is pretty important to know what exactly the nicotine or other chemicals, or who knows what, is in the actual vaping products. That would be something that needs to be looked at and, certainly, probably further studies are required. But we have to be careful that it is, I think, a useful tool for people who are trying to quit smoking.

The other side of the question is, though, and where I'm sure the tobacco companies would like—those e-cigarette companies would use it as a gateway product to

get more people hooked on nicotine, to get more people starting with vaping and then eventually switching to regular cigarettes. So certainly there are some concerns.

The other schedule is schedule 1, the Healthy Menu Choices Act. That's to do with having calorie counts. Let me see here: "Owners and operators of regulated food service premises are required to display the number of calories in each standard food item sold at the premises, as well as any other information required." I don't have a problem with that, especially because it doesn't require, from my understanding the ma-and-pa, one-off operations to do that, which I think would probably be expensive and tricky for them. It's meant for: "Regulated food service premises' are food service premises that sell meals for immediate consumption, and that belong to a chain with 20 or more Ontario locations"—I think that's an important qualifier—so the bigger chains that would have the resources to be able to provide caloric information.

0930

I like the "educate versus legislate" approach, and I think we need to do what we can to encourage people to have healthy lifestyles. In terms of food, that's a balance of eating various food products. You seem to see different reports all the time about what is healthy or what it not healthy for you. As I mentioned some of the times I've had an opportunity to comment on this bill, I'm reading a book called *The Big Fat Surprise*, which is basically telling us that all we've been told about fat being bad for you, a lot of it, is not necessarily true and that saturated fat, like you'd find in meat, for example, or butter or eggs, is actually needed by you.

I think the most important thing is that we have balance in our diet, but the other thing that really goes along with it is that we get enough exercise. I think we need to be doing things to encourage that, in our youth, especially, so they develop habits of enjoying exercise and having lifelong exercise.

Yesterday, I was pleased to attend the Ontario Bike Summit. In the past I've had private member's bills to do with paved shoulders. I think that's important, because we need to provide safe places for people to ride so they have an opportunity to get more exercise. I think we should be designing our schools with safe cycling routes to the schools. There's a new school plan for Parry Sound that's going to be a JK to high school, and I hope it's in a location where the kids can ride to school. I think it's important that we provide opportunities where they can get exercise in a safe manner.

I did want, just in the minute I have left, to mention that I also did meet with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. One of the things that they were asking about—their ask is to restrict marketing to kids to do with food and beverage. They point out that 31.5% of Canadian children and youth are overweight or obese; that the majority of marketed foods and beverage products—as much as 90%—are high in salt, fat, sugar and calories; and that the screen time among children and youth is seven hours and 48 minutes per day. I agree with that suggestion they

have, that we should restrict marketing to kids, because I think it's easy to get them to be consuming more of the things that are bad for them and breaking that balance. So I do think that's a recommendation makes sense.

I can see, Mr. Speaker, that I'm out of time, so I can't get into the other suggestions that the Heart and Stroke Foundation had, but thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise to comment on this bill.

As you're well aware, Speaker, it was our health critic, France Gélinas, who persistently introduced private member's bills to ban flavoured tobaccos and to require posting and informing of the public of the nutritional content, the fat content and the caloric content of foods. I think that when this bill is eventually passed, her contribution needs to be recognized.

There's no doubt the member from Muskoka made a very good argument about the need for more exercise for young people and for people in our society generally. I have no argument with that, Speaker; he's right. But I have to say that it would help a lot of people to know, when they purchase food in a restaurant, when they purchase food in a fast food restaurant, how much fat they're taking in, how many calories they're taking in, how much sugar and, frankly, as I think was mentioned, how much sodium as well.

People are often trying to juggle a variety of priorities in their lives, and giving them the information on exactly what their food contains so they can decide whether they're going to get something that is extremely fat-heavy or extremely calorie-heavy will help them make healthier choices. And that's what this is. It isn't prescribing to people what they must eat, but it is allowing them, if they're trying to control their weight, if they're trying to eat in a way that's healthier—giving them the information so they can make the decisions that are in line with their priorities, not the priorities of a company that tries to increase its sales by increasing the salt, sugar or fat content of its foods.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I spoke yesterday on this bill. I just wanted to add a few comments to the speaker today. We certainly encourage the bill in many aspects but we're a little concerned about some of it, like e-cigarettes.

I have a letter from a couple of constituents. I just want to paraphrase a little bit from one of them: "I am genuinely disappointed in what the government has done. You have basically lied to the population. You are going to make it difficult for people with a nicotine addiction to stay off cigarettes. You are ensuring that lifelong smokers will die of smoking-related diseases."

If you go through it, he's talking about the e-cigarettes and basically making it very difficult for many people to use them in certain cases.

I have another one: “I would like to address the proposed Bill 45 conditions regarding [e-cigarettes] and their effect on the industry, human health and our facility. Our studies, and many others worldwide, show that electronic cigarettes are the most effective stop-smoking aid available.

“Treating e-cigs as tobacco is dangerous to this industry, people’s health and freedom, and just plain scientifically inaccurate. I would like to request a short discussion” on the subject.

I have a little bit of concern. This is something I hear the government say, that while there’s no science to show that there’s a problem with them, they’ll look at them and maybe unrestrict them in the future, which is very hard. It’s just a funny way of going about things. If you look at the components that are in it, it is just vapour. I know many people who have struggled for years and years to try to quit smoking. Most have not been able to. This is a system that has come along that seems to do the trick and is not dangerous to anybody else with them.

I do like parts of the bill, certainly the part about the calories. I think that’s important. People struggle with weight, and that would certainly be a step in the right direction as far as getting help for those as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to finish off what I was talking about earlier, about how communities are rallying around food security and helping people make healthy food choices.

One of the concerns, too, is how many people are now accessing food banks. I know that that number is on the rise, people accessing food banks because of difficulties, financially, that they find themselves in with regard to—as I mentioned before—underemployment, precarious employment and working for the minimum wage.

This morning on the news there was the city of Orillia. They had a storm and many trees in their city park were overturned. They’re looking at replanting these trees, which is a great thing for the environment. The food bank has suggested that they plant fruit trees because, again, when we talk about food security that people are concerned about, and making healthy choices, the food bank says that it’s very expensive to purchase fresh fruit. This would be very helpful and help the food bank bring fruit into their facility when people are accessing food.

Anyway, I just wanted to mention that because we talk about healthy eating, and healthy eating is in everyday life. When you’re at home and also when you’re going to that restaurant and making those healthy choices, the knowledge that the people will have on those menu labels will certainly help that aspect of it.

The other piece that I have also talked about was the e-smoking. I think that in this particular case there is some tightening up in the bill that we need to really look at under the e-cigarettes section. I look forward to the information that’s going to come to committee to make that possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I just want to say that I think this legislation, like many pieces of legislation, is really about trying to make the general public aware and more sensitive to some of the challenges that may be out there in terms of whether it is driving or whether it’s the food we eat. I think in the long run that awareness really enables the consumer, the member of the public, to make a better decision.

0940

As you know, the opposite of that is that you get bombarded by all these ads by—God love them—the corporations that want to make billions. If you sit down at night and watch a hockey game, all you’re getting is big fat hamburgers. There’s one pizza now: a cheeseburger pizza. How gross. We wonder why young people are getting into bad habits, why diabetes is on the rampage.

Smoking, this cancerous habit, has killed millions of people. By the way, as you know, your good friends at the big tobacco companies, Mr. Speaker, denied that smoking was linked with cancer. We remember that. They challenged everybody. Talk about lawsuits. They were just incessant in blocking any attempt to recognize that smoking was linked to cancer. This fight continues, and that’s why in this legislation we’re looking at e-cigarettes: because they’re trying to hook young kids on smoking through the back door, through these e-cigarettes. It says, “Under 19, you can’t buy them.” This is an ongoing attempt—I think it’s a good attempt, in the right direction—to control these big corporations that you’re so fond of, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from Toronto–Danforth, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, London–Fanshawe and Eglinton–Lawrence for their comments.

The member from Toronto–Danforth was talking about the fact that we need more exercise. I completely agree with that. That’s why I think we need to look at all ways of getting our youth to pick up habits where they exercise for their entire life. That’s why I think it would be a good idea to look at safe cycling routes to school and try to make it a policy of the government that we create safe cycling routes to school to provide our youth the opportunity to get exercise on a daily basis as they get themselves to and from school.

He also talked about the calorie count that will be required by restaurants. I have no problem with that. I think generally with food, we should be moving to less processed food, more making meals from scratch.

E-cigarettes were talked about by the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. I think that balancing the benefits of them versus the harm they may cause if they become a gateway product is very important.

The member from London–Fanshawe was talking about food banks. I note that the member from Sarnia–Lambton did have a private member’s bill that would

give a tax credit to farmers for extra product that they donated to food banks. I thought that was a good idea, and obviously the government did as well, because it got adopted into the government's Local Food Act. Congratulations to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for coming up with that good idea and getting it implemented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I note that the Progressive Conservatives are certainly keen on health today as many of us are up speaking to it today. It's Bill 45 we're debating today, the Making Healthier Choices Act, 2014. A similar version was brought in in the last session by the then Minister of Health. Now we see a revised bill including e-cigarettes. Compliments to the NDP from Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, for her tenacious promotion of healthier acts that are brought into the Legislature, e-cigarettes being one of them.

The bill touches on three sections: the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2014; the Smoke-Free Ontario Act; and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2014. I'll just try and talk a bit on all those topics in the few minutes that I have this morning.

We've certainly all spoken about obesity in the Legislature this morning and previously. We had the Heart and Stroke Foundation in last week speaking about the rise of obesity here in Ontario. We all know it's no secret that about half of our population does not meet the physical activity and healthy eating recommendations made by our health organizations.

The member that was up previously mentioned Share the Road, the increase of cycling. I also have many hats in the Legislature, but tourism and culture is one of those. And certainly sharing the road, the paved shoulders, is something that I think all three parties have worked on collectively, that when highways need to be resurfaced that the shoulders are paved. That helps not only with our healthy activities and cycling, but actually is a great tourism boom to many of our areas. I know up in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock we're trying to increase the tourism and the cycling paths that we do have. I know there was a Share the Road event last night, so I wanted to put a plug in for the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, who has brought that bill in two, three times now?

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes. And there was somebody from Haliburton there last night, I think.

Ms. Laurie Scott: There you are: Someone from Haliburton was there last night. I actually have gone and cycled with them a few times.

As a nurse before I entered the Legislature, there is no question that the obesity rates that you see increasing are certainly going to be drastic to our health concerns going forward, in treating the diseases that are affected by obesity. Some 28% of children aged two to 17 are overweight, which is extraordinary. Of course, you hear of younger people having heart attacks and strokes and high blood pressure. It's definitely time for some changes to occur.

Education, of course, is the best thing we can do to make them more aware; get the whole family involved. Banning junk food in the schools—you saw that happen and then have you concerns from the principals about the fact that the kids then leave the schools to go out to get the food they actually want to eat; and there's a health concern about them not being on school property and crossing the roads. There is a lot of concern there. So, again, the whole, I think, integration when they're younger from their parents about eating healthy is probably a more wholesome strategy, and ramping up our daily physical activity.

I know the World Health Organization has warned us that the number of overweight children under five years of age is estimated to be over 42 million, and almost all of them are in developed countries like Canada. So I guess we can say fast food is very popular. When I was travelling a long time ago the introduction of McDonald's, I think it was in Japan, had increased the obesity immensely over there. There was just a marked difference—just something I remember from way back.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You must have been just a child.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I was just a child travelling. Thank you, the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

The menu labelling: It's suggested that it's for chains that are over 20 stores. I think that you see that is going to happen more voluntarily in the smaller businesses, the smaller restaurants, because people are actually looking for it. Certainly, when I go into a business, I will look to see if there's any labelling, calorie counts, to see what the healthiest option is to eat.

These things come eventually. We, as legislators, can bring in a certain amount of rules and regulations, but we have to get the education going from home. So we have to do a bit of family responsibility—you see lots of companies that join in: the Big Bike you see for Heart and Stroke through the communities; the whole community sees 50-some people on bicycles that are raising money for Heart and Stroke. That helps influence.

The smoke-free part of it I have spoken to a lot, in the sense of the contraband tobacco, which is a huge issue the government does have to deal with. I spoke again when the Heart and Stroke were in, but, really, almost a third of all tobacco sales in Ontario are contraband. I have a newspaper article from My Kawartha here where the OPP seized contraband tobacco in traffic stops outside of Curve Lake, which is just outside of my riding, in the Peterborough riding. I have to say that I've seen a lot of, let's say, open trunks in some of my communities, and contraband tobacco is being sold from those trunks. That hurts our small businesses. I know the member from Haldimand–Norfolk has spoken many times about that.

Most of the contraband tobacco, if they do the butt surveys from the high schools—I know it seems strange that they go and pick up cigarette butts, but the butt surveys from the high schools show that at least 30%—and some statistics show as high as 50%—are contraband tobacco. And you don't know what's in that contraband tobacco. Smoking is hazardous for your health: proven time and time again. But the fact is that this is not controlled

tobacco. You don't know what's in it, so it's even more harmful, we can say, that it's being sold, especially to our young people.

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Addressing the consumption of tobacco: I had at one time in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock the highest incidence of lung cancer related to smoking; that study was done. I think education has changed that somewhat now: more options or more availability for people to understand the hazards of smoking that are there.

E-cigarettes are interesting. I've had quite a few constituents actually send emails in. I understand the impact of a smoke-free culture, but the e-cigarettes, especially older people—I'll say over 50—actually find them very effective in helping them quit smoking. There seems to be a balance that needs to happen, where the science is about e-cigarettes, because there are actually people out there who find that—"electronic cigarettes" is what I'm saying, "e-cigarettes"—electronic cigarettes actually are helping people stop smoking. I know actually a member in the Legislature who uses that as smoking prevention. So there is the balance out there. I know they want the culture to not be seen smoking in respect to e-cigarettes, but I think that you do have to look at the other side: about e-cigarettes actually helping people to quit smoking.

I know that I only I have a couple of minutes left, but I want to try to hit all the topics that I wanted to talk about.

When we talk about Participation, I do hear that when the schools have increased activities—so-called—for physical activity, I think a lot of schools sometimes don't fully do the physical activity we're thinking of. We don't want kids to sit in chairs and twist their ankles and just move around a little bit. We actually want them to either get outside at recess—and sometimes in the very cold months they can't—but have some alternatives where there is actually activity that causes the heart rate to go up a little. I don't say they have to go into a full-bore workout, but some type of activity that actually causes them to increase their heart rate and make it count as some physical activity that is actually productive to keep them in shape. Again, this is like a pattern that they hopefully carry on throughout their life to make sure they can be involved in sports, if they can be.

I know it's very expensive out there. I want to shout out to the Canadian Tire Jumpstart program, which helps kids that don't have enough money to participate in sports, especially hockey that happens a lot in our small towns, but it's so expensive it actually restricts a lot of kids from joining in physical Participation.

We're happy to see Bill 45 come forward. We're happy, when enough speakers have spoken, to get into committee to make some changes. I raised a few concerns, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for that opportunity this morning, as my time winds down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, it's always a privilege standing on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin, talking to this bill, Bill 45, this morning.

I want to bring a negative and a positive to the tobacco discussion. The negative is, I quit smoking 20 years ago, and every day, I continue to quit smoking because it's always difficult. It has been a lot easier over the course of the years. The difficult part about it now is that one of my family members has been weak to tobacco and has succumbed to peer pressure. I look in his eyes and stand in front of him knowing that I lost my father to lung cancer and I lost my mom to heart disease.

I have to say that there's a good part to this story. My father-in-law, Jean-Guy Constantin, is in Gogama. Bonjour, mon beau-père. He was cutting wood in the backyard—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: His business card would be that long.

Mr. Michael Mantha: What's that?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: His business card would be that long.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes.

He was cutting wood in the backyard, and do you know what? He choked on a little blackfly. When he choked on the blackfly—and he was a smoker at the time—he coughed up some phlegm, and in his phlegm there was a little bit of blood. My mother-in-law took him immediately to the hospital in Timmins. While he was in Timmins, he got an X-ray done. The X-ray showed a small growth. Within a day, he was on the surgery table. The cancer was removed. He has been in remission for seven years. It's because of that little blackfly.

So the next time you hit a blackfly on you, don't hit him too hard; he might be coming around to save you.

That's a positive story that came out of this. My father-in-law is still around today. I love him. He's a grumpy old man, but he's my father-in-law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, I just want to make a couple of points. First of all, I support this legislation. I'm particularly impressed with the e-tobacco ban. I too had parents who smoked and paid the ultimate price for that, so for some very personal reasons and for all the right policy reasons, I think this legislation, particularly as it relates to e-cigarettes, is the right thing to do.

Having said that, I want to point out to this House that we've been debating this bill now for 10 hours—10 hours. Listening to the debate, it's clear that all parties support this piece of legislation. In fact, over 60 members from the three parties have spoken to this bill. So we should move this bill ahead, get through second reading, and get the bill out to committee so that we can hear the public's views on it and bring it back for third reading.

It's just strange that we've spent so much time on a piece of legislation that all three parties seem to support, that over 60 members support and have made the effort to speak to.

Why do all three parties support it and why did over 60 members take the time and trouble to speak in support of it? It's because on all three points—on the food labelling, it's the right thing to do. The food labelling

concept developed a couple of decades ago in California, so everything you buy in the store now has the nutritional component of it. This is the next logical step: to have that same information on the restaurant products, on the menus, that you find in products that you buy off of the shelf at a supermarket.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I want to compliment my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for her excellent presentation, even though it was only 10 minutes. She’s a health professional, and she knows her stuff.

When we talk about this particular bill, Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, a couple of things come to mind for me. I remember back when I was a teenager and it was kind of cool to smoke. That was the cool thing—no pun intended, with regard to menthol cigarettes.

The other thing is that my father was a smoker and he also smoked pipes. I remember green Sail tobacco. I found myself looking at the cherry-flavoured tobacco and found that it had a nice fragrance. You weren’t realizing or really caring that much about the impact it was having on your lungs and the potential cancer threats and so on.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is the fact that there’s childhood obesity out there. The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock mentioned in her speech that we need to get our children more active. It’s going on okay in the grade schools, but in high schools, if I had my way, I would like to see health and physical education mandatory in every year that the students are there. It was mandatory for me. I think that kids need to be more aware of the importance of physical activity in their lives.

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The last thing I wanted to talk about was the fact that there are approximately 13,000 people in Ontario who die every year—that’s 36 people a day, and it’s tragic. We’ve got to take a look at the burden on our health care system. Anything we can do to alleviate and move children and even adults away from smoking will be a greater benefit for our health care system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Indeed, it’s a pleasure to stand in my place today and make comments on the response of my friend from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I know when she mentioned the junk food in high schools, I was reminded of the time I was out and about and bumped into a woman—I think she was the president of the student council at Essex high school. She said, “Do you think the government’s ever going to revisit that?” I said, “I don’t think so. Why?” “Well, we used to get a share of the profits from the machines at the cafeteria, and we don’t get it anymore because our kids aren’t eating the food in the school anymore because they’ve taken the bad stuff out. They’re going”—as the member said—“across the street, down the road, and getting the fast food.” We know the fast food isn’t good for you.

Smoking’s not good for you, either. My mom and dad smoked, my wife’s mom and dad smoked, and 37 years ago, when my son was born, we said, “No more smoking around the kids.” So that put an end to that. They all stopped smoking. Two of them are still alive, which is a good thing.

The habits that we pick up when we’re young stick with us forever. I was saying the other day how my mom used to bake homemade bread, and I would do everything I could to eat food with my bread. I forgot to mention my mom’s homemade baked beans: I would get bread and butter and make those homemade baked-bean sandwiches. I miss them so much, Speaker. If they had them downstairs, I’d have them for lunch.

But those are habits that we pick up when we’re young, and they stick with us forever. They stick with us forever. So if we can break the habits now, get the kids eating healthy now, maybe they’ll continue that, and their children will pick up those good habits instead of the bad habits that I picked up when I was young.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes has two minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. I don’t think I’ll forget that, now that you’ve mentioned the blackfly story and your father-in-law. It’s very important to watch those little signs that do occur in which you need further health investigation.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: It’s always good to have healthy debate in the Legislature. As I said, this bill was brought forward in the last session. They could have sped it up and put it through then, but anyway, we are very happy to continue the debate. There’s never enough debate on healthy choices that we have here.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex: I thank him for his comments, and the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, certainly, about the school story, a very valid school story about the fact that you can’t force kids to do what you think is good for them. That’s why you have to start the education early. Hopefully, the parents have instilled some good eating habits for them, at least half the time, that you can eat properly, but it certainly is a concern out there.

I wanted to mention that Health Canada is actually doing some research into the e-cigarettes, so I say to the government, maybe we should watch for the Health Canada studies before we make any final declaration on the electronic cigarettes issue of this bill because, as I said, some people actually find they help them in smoking cessation.

I think that there is always a lot that we can do to promote healthy choices, but we should maybe be mindful of how it’s actually going to affect the public. We used the young children, for banning junk foods in the schools: It still didn’t stop them from eating junk food; we just put them in more of a dangerous situation as they leave the schools.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to stand in this House today to speak to this bill.

I know that if we don't listen to our constituents, we are not going to be successful in this position. What I want to do is read a few letters that were sent to me—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's pretty noisy, down in the third party area. If you want to have a major discussion—and you've had about nine of them—if you'd like to go outside with it, I'd appreciate it.

Member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker.

This letter was sent to me by the Perth District Health Unit. They are members of what they call the Think Team. I had three of them in my office during constituency week. They're all young folks, they're very concerned and they're very supportive of this bill.

It goes like this: "We are the members of the Think Team who work to promote healthy lifestyles for Perth county youth. Our team educates youth in our schools, community and on social media about important health issues, including significant work preventing youth from starting to use tobacco. As youth that are engaged and active advocates for youth health in Perth county, we would like to inform you that we are strong supporters of Bill 45, Making Healthier Choices Act, 2014. There are many reasons why we believe, as youth, this bill should be passed in our provincial Parliament.

"We see an increasing number of our peers using electronic cigarettes in Perth county. Since there is currently no legislation regarding electronic cigarettes, they can be sold to and used by youth. We have worked with local school boards to restrict the use of electronic cigarettes in our schools, but further legislation is required to protect our peers from this new product. We are working on a campaign to educate youth about electronic cigarettes, but this legislation will help prevent youth from using them in the first place. Electronic cigarettes are normalizing the act of smoking and reversing all of the good work tobacco control has accomplished. The Making Healthier Choices Act would restrict electronic cigarettes from being promoted and sold to youth under the age of 19.

"The tobacco industry flavours tobacco products as candy and fruit to make them more appealing to youth. Chew tobacco, cigarillos and electronic cigarettes are all flavoured tobacco products and are most popular among youth. Making tobacco products less appealing by not including any flavouring will prevent youth from starting to use tobacco products. The Making Healthier Choices Act would prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco products, including menthol, which would decrease the likelihood of our peers and future generations of youth from using tobacco products."

Now they go into the menu labelling: "Finally, menu labelling of caloric values in restaurants would also be beneficial to Perth county youth. Menu labelling will help our peers to make more informed and smarter decisions when it comes to eating out. Today's youth are

busy and constantly on the go, so having the option to make healthy and nutritious decisions when they eat out is important. Being able to see directly ... in a pamphlet or on a website. The Making Healthier Choices Act would require restaurants with 20 or more locations to post caloric information on their menus and menu board. Menu-labelling legislation is a key component of the Healthy Kids Strategy, which aims to reduce childhood obesity by 20% over five years.

"We hope that you agree with our position and will support the passing of this bill, which is crucial to the health of Perth county youth. If your schedule allows," they would like to schedule a meeting with me, which they did, Speaker. Three of them came in to speak to me.

This letter is signed by members of the Think Team: Kelsey Ramseyer, Zach Misener, Alli Van Bakel, Amanda Roberts, Megan Speiran and Dani Schoonderwoerd. It's also signed by the medical officer of health, Dr. Miriam Klassen, who is with the Perth District Health Unit. I personally know Dr. Klassen, as she was my family doctor at one time, until she got this position as the medical officer of health.

I also received a letter from another constituent, Brian Reid, who is from Mitchell. He writes: "I am writing to convey my strong support for the tobacco provisions in Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act.

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"Amendments to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act included in Bill 45 would ban flavourings, including menthol, in all tobacco products. Adding enticing flavours to tobacco products is one of the key ways that tobacco companies entice youth and young adults to experiment with tobacco. A government that is serious about reducing the unacceptable toll of illness and death from tobacco use must do everything possible to prevent tobacco companies from seducing our youth. Tobacco companies will likely claim that only adults use tobacco with menthol, but recent research tells a very different story.

"The latest Youth Smoking Survey shows that almost a third of youth who smoked in the past month smoked a menthol cigarette (and almost half of those who had used some type of tobacco in the past month had used a flavoured product). This is 2015—we have known for more than 50 years that smoking causes cancer—it is time for governments to stop bowing to pressure from the tobacco companies. I urge you to oppose any demands from the industry for an exemption for menthol. Governments should be doing everything they can to prevent youth from starting to smoke and to encourage people to quit. Banning all flavours in all types of tobacco products would make a valuable contribution to this effort.

"Bill 45 also contains critical legislation to regulate electronic cigarettes. The bill would ban the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, limit their promotion, and ban their use in workplaces and public places like restaurants, where smoking is already banned. I understand that e-cigarettes might help some smokers quit, but I also believe that if they are not appropriately controlled, we could see a new generation of youth addicted to a new

form of nicotine. As well, I personally do not want to be exposed to whatever chemicals the vapour may contain. Much more research needs to be done on these products, and until we have more information about their impact, the government is right to exercise caution.

“Once again, I would like to reiterate my strong support for these really important tobacco control initiatives. We have made great progress in creating a ‘smoke-free Ontario,’ but with 18% of Ontarians still smoking—a rate that hasn’t changed since 2009—much more remains to be done.”

This letter was sent to me by Brian Reid from Mitchell, as I have already mentioned.

Speaker, I think we as politicians and elected officials to this House need to listen to our constituents—that is why we’re here—and to support or not support legislation that they ask us to do. Certainly, these two letters are in support of this bill. I’m pleased that they took time not only to write these letters to me but to visit my office.

We had a chat, a very good chat, with these people from the Think Team. They’re just young high school students who are leaders in their community, in their high school, who took the initiative to set up this meeting to express their concern—not their concern with the bill, but their support for this bill. I do appreciate that. I think that’s what we do as legislators: We have to represent, and we should represent, the constituents in our riding.

Speaker, I have another letter here from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Actually, my wife canvasses our neighbourhood for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and goes around. They do great work promoting healthier lifestyles. Certainly, smoking is on their radar.

I don’t have enough time to read the whole letter. It was sent to me by Mark Holland. I’m sure everybody got this one. It was sent to me by Mark Holland, the executive director, Ontario mission, and national director of children and youth at Heart and Stroke Foundation; and Rowena Pinto, the vice-president of public affairs and strategic initiatives of the Canadian Cancer Society in the Ontario division. I’m sure all members got this letter, so they can read it at their leisure.

Again, Speaker, thank you for this time. I think this bill is certainly something that is supported by members of my community.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I’d like to ask the House to welcome members of CUPE Ontario who are here today with their president, Fred Hahn, for their lobby day. I know that many members will be meeting with them. Also, I understand that all members are invited to join Fred and his colleagues at 5 p.m. for their MPP reception in the legislative dining room. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, the world works in mysterious ways: my friends the Tories welcoming CUPE. Anyway, nonetheless, as New Democrats, we’d like to welcome, on behalf of all the Legislature, Fred Hahn, Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, John Camilleri, Kelly O’Sullivan and our good friend Henri Giroux that I know the member from Nipissing knows very well.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I do things in tandem with my other two House leaders, so I want to join them and join all the members in welcoming the hard-working members of our public service, represented by CUPE Ontario and my good friend Fred Hahn. All of you: Welcome to Queen’s Park. Thank you for your public service.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we continue, I would like to know that we can get through introducing guests without heckling. That would be very helpful.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Today our page from Huron–Bruce is page captain Rahul, and I’m pleased to welcome his mother, Priya Pandya, to the gallery.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I’d like to introduce page captain Japneet Kaur’s mom, Jaswant Kaur, and father Robin, who are joining us in the gallery today.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: April is Sikh Heritage Month, and I’d like to ask for unanimous consent to wear a pin commemorating April as Sikh Heritage Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Brampton West is seeking unanimous consent to wear the pin for Sikh Heritage Month. Do we agree? Agreed.

Mr. Paul Miller: I’d like to introduce Dave Murphy. Dave is with CUPE, and he represents Hamilton Health Sciences.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I’d just like to welcome to the Legislature the grade 12 students from Silverthorn Collegiate. They’re taking an elective grade 12 politics class. I would ask you to join me in welcoming them to the Legislature. Thank you for coming.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I do want to welcome our friend Henri Giroux from North Bay to the Legislature today.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I’d like to thank two people who were instrumental in having these pins made, and they’re here today: Gursimrat Singh Grewal and Baljinder Sara. Baljinder is here with his family: Virpal Kaur, Parneet Kaur, Anisha Kaur and his father, Gurdev Kaur, and Balvir Kaur. I’d like to welcome them to Queen’s Park today.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I’d like to welcome Len Elliott, a constituent of mine from OPSEU, who is here today in the gallery, as well as my friend Heather Skolly, who’s here today with CUPE.

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

It is now time for question period.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If the member is not here, we’ll stand down the lead question.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, point of order: We don't have on our list that the Minister of Finance is not going to be here for question period, so I'm seeking some guidance. Is he coming?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: He's on his way.

Mr. Steve Clark: So we can stand down our leads?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've indicated that it's a courtesy that is offered, of who is here or not here. That courtesy doesn't always mean that that person will or will not be here.

That said, you always have the option to stand down your lead question, if that person needs to hear the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One moment, please.

I will have that stood down, and we may end up having to go through extra rotations. I understand that. I am going to ask that the table restart the clock. Once I make the indication of how, the member from Timmins-James Bay will stand on a point of order and ask me something.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We were unaware that we were going to have the lead stand down. We have gone to get our leader. She's not here just now, so we're going to have to go with question 3.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. One moment, please.

I'm going to look to the House leaders for a nod on this. If we take a five-minute recess for everyone's purposes—we will take a five-minute recess. This House stands recessed for five minutes.

The House recessed from 1037 to 1041.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Two years ago, your deficit was \$9.2 billion. Last year, your deficit soared to \$10.5 billion. Yesterday, you said you were pleased to report your deficit grew again to \$10.9 billion.

Minister, the only deficit target you should be pleased with is when you hit zero. You're heading the wrong way. You're getting further away from balancing, not closer. You're now spending \$29 million a day more than you're bringing in. In fact, in today's five-minute delay, you spent \$105,000 more than you took in.

Minister, you're failing families, you're hurting seniors, and you're putting them into an ever-deepening hole. Why should anyone believe you can balance the budget when you can't even reduce the deficit?

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjection: You're overachieving.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will act immediately on anyone who tries to get in heckles while I'm standing.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Well, the member opposite has noted the challenges that have been before this province over the last 10 years. Recognizing how tough it was in 2008 and 2009—not just in Ontario but all across Canada, similar to the situation that happened with the federal government—Ontario has taken action by stimulating growth. This year, we beat our targets yet again by \$1.6 billion. We do so by moving the trajectory to balance by 2017-18, as we said we would. We're on target. We're achieving results.

We're the lowest-cost government because of some of the tremendous actions we've taken on Treasury Board to reduce our spending, find savings and keep our fiscal house in order. Contrary to the opposition, we do want to stimulate the economy to ensure that we grow GDP, make sure that everyone is employed and make sure people and their families are better off.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, we realize it's April Fool's Day today, but you have to stop trying to fool the people of Ontario. Your own 2013 budget document listed the projected deficit at \$10.1 billion. The fact that you fluffed it up to a fake \$12.5-billion forecast only to announce it came in at \$1.9 billion didn't fool us, Minister.

Let's go back to the secret internal cabinet documents we obtained during the gas plant scandal file. They talked about doing just what you did. Use a fake number for the deficit that was "never a real expectation. It was a deliberate policy...."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Even that fake, inflated number was \$10.1 billion. You can't even meet your own fake number, Minister.

When are you going to come clean and tell us the real state of Ontario's economy?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this is serious business. The member opposite is slamming the province; he's talking down Ontario, which has worked hard—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Ontario has now, since the recession, surpassed almost every jurisdiction around the world to create 500,000 net new jobs. Ontario has become the top destination in all of North America, beating out Texas, New York, California and every other province for foreign direct investment. We're attracting in-

vestment, and that's because they know that we have a very competitive, and ensure that we have a very competitive, business climate to keep our taxes low to attract that investment.

We're creating jobs. We're stimulating growth. We're on a track to balance by 2017-18, as we said we would.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the minister: Now that we've heard the spin, let's hear the facts. The Conference Board of Canada said you can't balance the books by 2017-18. In their report titled *How Bad Is It?*, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce said, "Ontario's fiscal situation is becoming increasingly dire...." and "we are likely to reach a state of crisis unless the province ... changes the ways it does business." Moody's lowered their outlook from stable to negative. Fitch downgraded us to AA-. Everyone but you understands there's a serious problem in Ontario. Minister, when will you finally take the advice of experts and change course?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The Conference Board of Canada also states that Ontario, the government of Ontario, has the most integrity of its numbers than any other government in Canada. The Conference Board of Canada also states that Ontario is expected to lead all of Canada with growth in GDP because of the stimulus package that we put in place.

RBC, TD Bank and a number of economists recognize the tremendous work that Ontarians have done, that this province and this government have done, to stimulate growth in order—not only so that we can create greater revenue and greater wealth, but we are the lowest-cost government in Canada because of the efforts we've taken. We have controlled our spending, we're keeping our fiscal house in order, to take a balanced approach, not extreme measures that put people in harm's way or cut 100,000 people from their jobs, as the opposition has recommended.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Minister of Finance: Your deficit, which grew from \$9.2 billion to \$10.5 billion—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket–Aurora, come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —ballooning to \$10.9 billion this year, is proof that you're not listening to the experts. You're not changing the way you do business.

Minister, here's why all the focus on your deficit is so important: The Auditor General said, "Ontario's debt continues to grow faster than the province's economy, which could have negative implications for the province's finances." But her —

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the members from Ottawa–Orléans and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, that shouldn't be interpreted as encouragement.

Please finish.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker.

The Auditor General's biggest concern was "the 'crowding out' of other spending...." We now have less money for the things our citizens expect from the province. We're starting to see front-line cuts in health care and education, just as the auditor warned. Minister, are you too proud to admit you're wrong?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House will not fall prey to being reckless when it comes to cutting and slashing and burning the very services that Ontarians depend upon. We're also not going to be reckless in our spending, recognizing that we must maintain our house in fiscal order and hold the line—and we are, because we've become the lowest-cost government per capita in funding and spending by any government in comparison.

1050

We also note this: We have become one of the lowest-tax jurisdictions anywhere in the world, beating out every US state when it comes to the combined corporate income tax. We have also maintained very effective stimulus packages to encourage that investment and create those jobs that are so critical to families in Ontario. By so doing, we take that balanced approach. It's a measured approach that we said all along we would do. And we are disciplined and determined to balance by 2017—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, we're seeing death by a thousand cuts right now, today, here in Ontario. Nurses are being cut at hospitals right across the province. We all have examples. Here are some from my hometown of North Bay: 94 full-time and 34 part-time front-line health care workers, including nurses, have been cut; more than 50 positions, including professors, at Nipissing University, have been cut; 43 workers from Ontario Northland have been cut.

Will you admit, Minister, that your wasteful, scandalous and mismanaged spending is reducing services, hurting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Please carry on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Will you admit that your wasteful, scandalous and mismanaged spending is reducing services, hurting Ontario's children and putting the most vulnerable at risk?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll admit that the member opposite is confused because he is—what's the

term?—sucking and blowing. On the one hand, he’s suggesting that we make cuts. He’s suggesting, “Go across the board and find greater savings, and put people in harm’s way,” just as he ran on a platform to cut 100,000 jobs from Ontarians. Now he’s saying, “Wait a minute. You’re cutting too much.”

Mr. Speaker, we’re not doing that at all. We’re taking a balanced approach. We’re transforming the way government does business. The President of the Treasury Board is going line by line to ensure that everything we do is creating greater value for Ontarians, ensuring that we hold the line on our spending.

What they’re not doing is stimulating the economy. They’re not supporting transit and investment in infrastructure that enables us to do better. That is exactly what this budget is going to be all about. It is enabling us to succeed and surpass other provinces.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, on your watch, seniors and our most vulnerable have seen their hydro rates triple to the point where they need to decide whether it’s food or warmth. But that wasn’t enough for you. Your thirst to find even more money to feed your spending addiction seems to have no bounds. You cut cataract surgeries, you cut diabetes testing strips, you cut physiotherapy for seniors: This is exactly the crowding out the Auditor General told you would happen if you didn’t drastically change course.

A \$10.9-billion deficit built on self-interest is not a cause for celebration; it’s a legacy of disgrace, and you should be ashamed of it.

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Ontario was hit very hard during the recession. In fact, we were hit the first and the hardest, and we stayed the course and held our ground; Ontarians stood tall and strong, continuing to reinvest in enabling us not to feel the shock of the recession as deeply and as long as other places around the world.

He referenced some recommendations by Don Drummond. Not only have we surpassed all the work that was being recommended, we have now made even greater strides to ensure that we sustain even more savings going forward.

What the opposition is not talking about is investing in our people, investing in education and our skills and training, investing in infrastructure and transit that enables us to provide for more jobs and maintaining a very competitive and dynamic business climate so that we can create more jobs in our province. Mr. Speaker, that’s what we are doing.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier tell me on what page of

the Liberal platform Ontarians can find the Liberal plan to sell off Hydro One and local electricity utilities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the member opposite knows full well that in our budget—which they rejected not once but twice, the most progressive budget in living memory—we included in that the asset review because we are committed to building the infrastructure that this province—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are committed to building the infrastructure that the people of this province are demanding of this government. We need more investments in transit. We need more investments in transportation. We need more investments in the vital infrastructure that people depend on.

We have to pay for that, and that’s why we’re looking at our assets to see how we can recycle those assets to build the infrastructure of tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I know it’s April Fool’s Day, but most Ontarians have realized that that budget is anything but progressive.

Nick from Brampton wrote to the Premier, and he was good enough to copy my office on his letter to the Premier. This is what Nick said: “At no time did you ever state during your election campaign to the voting public that your platform included selling any valuable asset owned by the taxpayers of Ontario.”

What does the Deputy Premier have to say to people like Nick?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would expect that the leader of the third party would have read the budget. I can refer you to page 20 of the budget. Let me read this to you: “The government will look at maximizing and unlocking value from assets it currently holds, including real estate holdings as well as crown corporations such as”—wait for it—“Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.”

Page 4 of the Ontario Liberal plan says: “Our Moving Ontario Forward plan includes a balanced and responsible approach to paying for these investments.

“The funds will be from dedicated sources of revenue....

“—asset optimization: \$3.15 billion or 10.9%.”

It was in the budget, and if ever we wanted evidence that the third party did not read that budget, Speaker, we have it today.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, maybe the Deputy Premier should have been honest and said “sell-off” instead of “unlocking” and “optimizing,” and people might have been able to get it.

Lena is another person who wrote to me. Lena said: “Private, for-profit ownership of hydro will mean higher

rates, lower dependability and an end to public control over this vital function.”

Can the Deputy Premier give people like Lena any guarantee that the Liberal privatization plan won't mean higher bills, less reliability and an end to public management of an important public utility?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Not only were we very, very clear in the 2014 budget—which was twice rejected by the third party, which triggered the unnecessary election—but the third party also integrated our fiscal assumptions into their platform. So not only did they not read our budget; they did not read their own assumptions in their own budget.

She knows we have a mandate to move forward with unlocking the value of assets. We've been very clear: We are looking to unlock the value of those assets so we can invest in schools, in hospitals and in roads and bridges, and create jobs and build that necessary transportation and transit infrastructure.

Despite what the NDP says, we asked the council to retain the government's long-term ownership of the assets' core components. “We recommend keeping all three companies,” said Ed Clark.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Acting Premier. Investing in transit and transportation isn't a one-time deal. It's going to take investment year in and year out. The Liberals' answer is a one-time sell-off of Hydro One and local utilities. They'll get a lump sum of money, but that money is going to run out, and we'll be left paying higher hydro rates to private companies that have no accountability, no oversight and no interest in what's good for Ontarians. When the money runs out, we're going to be right back here, and the Premier will have to find something else to sell off.

1100

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development—second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What happened to long-term, sustainable solutions for building and paying for infrastructure in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. Listen, we recognize how important it is for us to reinvest where we can, to make even more money for the shareholders of this province, who are the people of Ontario, the taxpayers, who own these crown corporations.

We also made it clear in the 2014 budget that we would look at these endeavours and these initiatives in order to maximize value to Ontario. We are not going to put our heads in the sand and pretend that there isn't something that we can do better. That's why we're taking these initiatives.

The member opposite also should know that we used this as a platform in our last election, which the people of Ontario endorsed.

I just want to read these three principles that we abide by on this very issue:

“(1) The public interest remains paramount and protected;

“(2) Decisions align with maximizing value to Ontarians;

“(3) The decision process remains transparent, professional and independently validated.”

We're working in the interests of Ontarians, who own these very crown corporations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Liberals sell off Hydro One, this is going to be the result: Ontarians will pay higher hydro bills. The Premier will get a big lump of cash—there's no doubt—but when the cash is spent, Ontarians will still be paying skyrocketing hydro bills in this province, and there won't be any money left for any other infrastructure investments.

Why can't this Liberal government see the big picture when it comes to our hydro assets?

Hon. Charles Sousa: First off, rates in Ontario are, and always will be, set by the Ontario Energy Board. But secondly, we have established a Trillium Trust, a trust to reinvest in transit. Any proceeds that are gained from selling off land or shares of corporations that we may own, that aren't providing enough support for the people of Ontario, are invested into this trust, which is dedicated to transit.

This is about investing in transit, investing in infrastructure, to make us even more competitive. That has a greater return for Ontarians. For every dollar we invest, we get \$1.60 back. That's a much better return.

We want to ensure that we protect the interests of the public, and it's an ongoing benefit. What we will not do is sell off, something that happened with the 407, recognizing that we lost an annuity there. That is exactly what we're not going to do. We're going to make every effort to ensure that we—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Hydro One makes money each and every year. We can leverage public control to manage hydro rates. We can help with climate change, strengthen manufacturing and create jobs.

Robust, reliable, profitable, public hydro actually helps fund investment in public transit and transportation annually in this province, because it puts money annually into the public coffers.

Will the Liberal government finally abandon this ridiculous scheme to sell off our hydro utility and Hydro One?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We can always do better with respect to our crown corporations. We know that there are a number of dividends we receive, and we want to protect them. In fact, we want to enhance them and provide for greater return and greater value for money in regard to them. That's what we're doing here, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite doesn't seem to feel it's necessary to invest in transit—with respect to ensuring that we

become more competitive—with roads, bridges and infrastructure across this province. She feels that we don't have to do that, by way of looking at ways we can repurpose or revalue some of our assets to maximize that opportunity. They would rather we not do anything—and that is not an answer to the problem.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Attorney General. I think we can all agree that rising municipal insurance premiums must be reined in. In fact, we did all agree to that. Last February, I introduced a private member's resolution to implement a comprehensive, long-term solution to reform joint and several liability for municipalities. My motion received unanimous consent from all parties in this Legislature.

Minister, a year ago, your government agreed that this was a serious issue and that it must be addressed. That's why municipalities were so shocked when you told last year's AMO conference that you wouldn't do anything about it.

Municipalities want to know: Why did you change your mind and why won't you help them?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member for his question. Legal liability reform is an important and complex issue that significantly affects a diverse group of stakeholders in Ontario. The law commissions in Ontario, other provinces and other countries have examined this issue and determined that the rule of joint and several liability is the fairest way of dealing with a shortfall in damage. After considering the feedback we received from all stakeholders—from all stakeholders—Ontario has decided not to move forward with changes to the rule in joint and several liability at this time.

Mr. Speaker, we have looked at it. We have consulted with many stakeholders. This joint and several liability process has been in place for almost a hundred years and it will continue to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Again to the Attorney General: For years, this government has been promising action. I've seen the Attorney General's files. They show that you sought advice from trial lawyers. They show that you sought no advice from insurers, municipalities or taxpayers.

At the recent ROMA/OGRA conference, I spoke with many municipal officials. Overwhelmingly, they are furious. It's time to respect the will of municipalities across Ontario and respect the resolution that was passed in this House by all parties last year. Will you do it? Will you support the resolution I tabled two months ago?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'll say that to the member of the opposition: If your son has an accident and he's totally disabled, I will not be able to look in his eyes and say, "Your dad and I, when it was possible to do so, changed the rules, and now you have to rely on welfare for your benefits." I wouldn't be able to do that. That's why, after the consultation, we decided that we will continue with this joint and several liability.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can you confirm if the Premier's legal team has been in discussion with the legal teams for either Pat Sorbara or Mr. Lougheed in order to coordinate their defence?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're delighted that the member from Sudbury has joined our caucus. He is a very, very fine member.

The member from Timmins—James Bay knows full well that we're taking this seriously, that the Premier is co-operating completely with the investigation. He also knows that this investigation is taking place outside of this Legislature, by people who are competent and qualified to perform such investigations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, definitely no answer, just more rhetoric on the part of the government. So I'll ask it again: Is the Premier's legal team in discussion with the legal team from both Mr. Lougheed and Mrs. Sorbara when it comes to co-ordinating their defence in regards to the bribery allegation? Yes or no?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I said earlier, there's an investigation taking place. The Premier and all of us are co-operating fully with that investigation when asked. That investigation is taking place outside of this Legislature, which is where it should be taking place.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is for the Minister of Labour. In my riding of Halton, a number of organizations have advocated for better income supports, including increases to the minimum wage, tax relief for low-income earners and better protections for workers across Ontario. Groups like Poverty Free Halton, Community Development Halton and the Halton Poverty Roundtable have all asked for stronger supports for workers.

In my community, workers were pleased when the minimum wage was increased to \$11 an hour last June, but we have all seen what inflation does to the cost of living. Minimum wage workers are particularly hard hit by the soaring costs of goods in Ontario.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please explain how our government is addressing this issue for minimum wage earners in the retail, food service and other sectors in my riding?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the honourable member from Halton for the question. As you will know, last summer our government brought in the eighth increase to the minimum wage since we were first elected in 2003. Those of you in the House will remember that, in 2003, when we took over from the party across, working for an hour at minimum wage in Ontario earned you \$6.85—even less if you were a student. We've come a long way.

Last spring, we announced that the minimum wage would increase from \$10.25 to \$11. We introduced legislation that would tie further increases to the minimum wage to those same increases we see in the consumer price index. That legislation died on the order paper when the party across triggered the election we had last spring. Through the leadership of our Premier, though, Speaker, we brought that legislation back last fall and we've been able to pass it. This follows through on our commitment to tie annual increases in the minimum wage to the rate of inflation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a member of a party that is standing up for the hard-working minimum wage earners across our province.

The minister is correct. We have come a long way: from \$6.85 an hour to \$11 per hour and, soon, \$11.25 an hour. Some are advocating for an even higher minimum wage. But some small business owners in Halton have concerns that rising minimum wages might result in slow growth or even job cuts. With global economic uncertainty and the evolving nature of our economy, the way forward must be carefully considered. We must balance the needs of businesses while ensuring that our minimum wage earners keep up with the rising cost of living. Speaker, can the minister please explain how he plans to reach this balance?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you again for the supplementary. All hard-working Ontarians need to know that the income they have will keep up with the cost of living. Part of the reason we tied annual increases in the minimum wage to the CPI was to take the politics out of the decision.

Another reason was to ensure that businesses in this province have a predictable and fair way to plan for the annual increase. Each year, the government announces the new minimum wage before April 1. Businesses then have six months to prepare for that increase, and it comes into effect October 1.

This new process that we have in place was part of the recommendations of the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel. It advised the government on the best approach to take. We heard from experts; we heard from workers; we heard from businesses. They want stable and predictable increases to the minimum wage.

I'm proud to say that on this side of the House we're bringing forward the ninth increase to the minimum wage since we took office, and that families and businesses in this province now have the time to adequately prepare for it.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Why is the minister renegeing on his government's commitment to the Rouge National Urban Park and putting the whole thing at risk by playing petty, partisan political games?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This member may not realize it, but he's speaking to a member who has dedicated the last

30 years of his life to preserving this park. It is in my own backyard as a member from Scarborough. It's something I've worked on since I was a young lad, working in these halls as an assistant. So for you to question my commitment to this park is absolutely ridiculous. For the member to question this government's commitment to this park—this was the government, under David Peterson, that saved the Rouge park.

This is the only government right now that's standing up to make sure that the current protections we have in place are maintained, which is part of the agreement the federal government made. We will not sell out our commitment to that next generation—to ensure the park is there for them to enjoy. Even if you want us to do that, we're not going to.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: More than two years ago, Ontario signed an agreement to transfer land to the federal government to help create the Rouge National Urban Park in Scarborough. However, the minister recently decided to go back on his word and derail the entire process for no good reason. He even has the gall to use it for Liberal fundraising.

The Globe and Mail recently said this: "Ontario's justification for pulling out of the deal doesn't hold up to scrutiny."

The Globe went on to say that he's "playing games," and, "It appears that the interests of his government don't include letting the federal Conservatives announce a new national park in the GTA during this election cycle."

When will the minister keep his word and stop holding up the Rouge National Urban Park?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I gave some people a warning about me standing and their continuing to heckle.

Answer, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, this government remains absolutely committed to a federal national park at some point in time when the federal government is willing to live up to their part of that agreement. They were supposed to put forward legislation that was equal to or greater than the protections that we currently have in Ontario today. I have a legal document that verifies that that is simply not the case, and I've had legal representation take a look at that just to ensure that our position is credible, and our position is absolutely credible. The current federal legislation is much weaker than the protections that land has now.

You're asking us to pass on that land to weaker federal protections. We're not going to do it. We're not going to do it.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government ought to work with us to put in place the proper protections for these—

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The same holds true on this side.

New question.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier.

Speaker, today Londoners learned that double-salary deals in lieu of leave for senior university executives are not new in the sector. In fact, the president of Western University received an earlier double payout in 2009 when he was at the University of Waterloo.

Acting Premier, when you became aware of the double payout in 2009, why did your government do nothing to prevent these kinds of deals, which result in million-dollar salaries, from being negotiated by university boards of governors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we passed Bill 8. We introduced Bill 8 prior to the election. We would have passed it sooner had an unnecessary election not been triggered. When we reintroduced the legislation, the NDP voted against the legislation that would give us the opportunity to control executive compensation.

We acknowledge that there is a problem with executive compensation in the broader public sector. That's why we introduced Bill 8. That is why we are moving forward to develop the frameworks for appropriate executive compensation.

So, Speaker, they're just a little bit late to this party. Why they voted against the legislation that will give us the right to actually control executive compensation in the broader public sector—makes their accusations a little bit hollow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: On Monday the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities said that the public has a right to know that tax dollars are being spent properly, but on Tuesday he said that universities are autonomous institutions and can make their own hiring and contract decisions.

Acting Premier, Ontario students are facing the highest tuition rates in Canada, increasing class sizes and more classes taught by contract faculty than ever before.

How can the public be assured that taxpayer dollars are being spent appropriately when university boards of governors are allowed to write double-salary clauses into the contracts of senior university executives?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, let me repeat: Bill 8 gave the government the ability to actually control broader public sector executive compensation. That is a good piece of legislation. This House passed it without the support of the NDP, so how they can stand up and criticize us for not taking action, when they voted against

the very action that they're demanding now, is just beyond me.

We are on this. We are addressing this issue because we do believe that the taxpayers of this province, the citizens of this province, should know why people are paid what they are paid. Those are the answers that we are developing right now as we speak.

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FOREST INDUSTRY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Ontario's forestry industry contributes about \$11 billion to our economy and supports about 200,000 direct and indirect jobs. This includes Cherry Forest Products in Puslinch, Ontario, very near my riding of Cambridge, which employs over 100 workers.

In 2013, Ontario exported \$4.9 billion in forest products. Forestry operations can only realize their full economic potential when there's synergy between operations. Sawmill operators rely on selling their residuals in order to maintain their economic viability. Therefore, it's imperative that Ontario finds innovative ways to put wood waste to work. One potential use of wood waste is biomass energy.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: What is our government doing to support innovative uses, such as biomass, for forestry residuals?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. There are in fact some very encouraging signs in the forestry industry right now. We are seeing a number of new sawmills opening on a regular basis. We are now harvesting upwards of 14 million cubic metres of wood. In the depth of the recession in forestry, we were down to about eight million cubic metres.

In fact, a new industry in northern Ontario called biomass pellet production has just begun. A couple of weeks ago, I was in Atikokan with my colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, and with the support of \$4 million from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, we have seen two biomass pellet production facilities open, one in Wawa and one in Atikokan.

It's good news for the forest industry. It will help them ride through the cyclical ups and downs that we have traditionally seen in the industry. It's new. It's creating more jobs. It's another good piece of what we're seeing happen in forestry, a piece of the industry that did not exist until these two operations got started, so we're very proud of this piece in northern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I thank the minister not only for the answer but also for his commitment to supporting Ontario's forestry sector.

Maintaining a market for forestry residuals is a key part of supporting the economic viability of mills throughout Ontario. I know that this investment will go a long way in supporting this very important sector.

By increasing our use of biomass energy, Ontario can reduce our use of fossil fuels and reduce our carbon footprint. Unlike oil, gas or coal, which emit carbon absorbed from the environment thousands of years ago, there's no additional carbon released from the combustion of biomass; it emits the same carbon that it absorbed just a few months or years ago. In fact, two million tonnes of wood pellets could produce 3.4 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year. This is sufficient to power about 285,000 homes in Ontario.

Speaker, again through you to the minister: What is our government doing to put wood waste to work and support—

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

Hon. Bill Mauro: In 2003, all political parties made a commitment to close coal in the province of Ontario. We've followed through on that commitment, and I know our Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is very happy that we've actually begun to do that.

Speaker, my point is that that policy of closing coal in Ontario has led directly to the conversion of two of those old coal plants, one in Thunder Bay and one in Atikokan. That conversion of those coal plants has indirectly, I would say—if not directly—led to the spawning of this new industry here in the province of Ontario. In the Atikokan context, the Rentech facility that is located in Atikokan now has a contract for years out to supply biomass pellets to the Atikokan generating station.

What we now have is a piece where we've gotten out of coal, and we've created a new industry in the province. It's green, it's sustainable, it has engaged First Nations, and it's a long-term new approach to providing forestry in the province of Ontario. It's a good piece on a variety of levels.

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is the Minister of Finance. Minister, the loss of a loved one is never easy. We all know that the time period after is extremely difficult for all Ontarians.

The Estate Administration Tax underwent changes this year. These changes broaden the criteria of what will be affected, shorten the amount of time that is allowed to comply with these rules to 90 days, and increase the penalties for misfiling by adding jail time of two years.

Why is your government making it more difficult for Ontarians by implementing these changes?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. Certainly, the member opposite recognizes the importance of ensuring integrity in our revenues, ensuring that everyone pays their appropriate share and their fair share. That's all this is about, Mr. Speaker. We're asking people to comply with what is the law and nothing more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, what you're asking these people to do within a 90-day time period may be impossible for some, to actually get the documents. If they

don't do so, they're going to jail. That's ridiculous, Minister.

We on this side of the House hope your government isn't trying to find new ways to tax people after they die. Are you scrambling to cover your government's financial mismanagement?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite wants us to ensure that we manage appropriately the revenues and the expenses, to ensure that everything is running effectively, to look at the underground economy, to ensure that everybody pays their fair share.

We recognize that families struggle in those times, and they prepare ahead of time. There are a lot of lawyers involved. There are trust funds; there are estates. There are a number of mechanisms that are being used which actually preclude certain things from being done. Appropriately, we want to make certain that everybody abides as they should. That's all this is, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite from that party, who's asking for this to even be implemented, in terms of providing for all the measures necessary to balance the books—this is not about balancing the books. It's just about making sure everybody complies.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Acting Premier. This morning's report gives us only a glimpse of the Liberals' SAMS fiasco—at least 57 problems; defects identified on a weekly basis—yes, Deputy Premier, I'm coming to you. Staff are still overwhelmed nearly five months after SAMS started creating chaos for social assistance recipients.

Will the Acting Premier finally admit that the Liberals got us into the SAMS mess and still, months later, have no clue how to fix it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I was certainly pleased to receive the interim report from PricewaterhouseCoopers this morning and to release it publicly.

This is the interim report. We're going to be studying it very carefully. We will receive a more fulsome, comprehensive report, in its final iteration, at the end of this month.

I'm really pleased to see that they have taken a very broad look at the issues around SAMS. They're looking at planning, organizational change management, user experience, stakeholder management and communications, and the transition to operations and governance.

Some of their preliminary findings acknowledge the problems with SAMS. Of course, we, as a ministry—our project team, along with our partners, IBM—have been working literally around the clock to engage the staff and make improvements within the system.

As we look forward, we know that staff do need more support. We acknowledge that, and we will be moving forward in this regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Front-line staff and families on OW and ODSP can tell this government absolutely everything that they need to know about the failures of SAMS. They can tell the Liberals how SAMS has left them without money for food and rent. They can tell the Liberals how SAMS sent hundreds of private tax details and SIN numbers to the wrong people. In fact, they've been trying to tell the Liberals for over a year that SAMS has been a disaster waiting to happen.

Speaker, will the minister table the invoices for the complete cost of a report that wouldn't be needed if the Liberals actually listened to caseworkers and social assistance recipients from the very start?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: As I've said in this House, I do want to acknowledge and thank all our dedicated caseworkers. I see many members here from CUPE and OPSEU. I think they're well aware that I mean it when I say that we want to work together to in fact make their lives a little more simple in terms of this particular computer system, to make it more user-friendly; and I'm actively engaged in that myself.

In terms of what the report has found, of course, are a number of findings. Some areas for improvement will make sure that all offices are adapting the way they deliver services, so that they can be supported in terms of the business functions in those offices.

We definitely know and we've learned—it's confirmed with this report—that we need to improve the dissemination of best practices across all of some 250 offices in this province.

1130

LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. John Fraser: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. En cette année où nous célébrons les 400 ans de présence française en Ontario, il est important de réaliser qu'il y a plus de 1,2 million de francophones et de francophiles en Ontario. Qu'ils soient Franco-Ontariens depuis 400 ans ou Franco-Ontariens issus de l'immigration récente, tous les francophones de l'Ontario se préparent à fêter en grand cette année.

Monsieur le Président, est-ce que la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones peut nous donner un court aperçu de ce que le gouvernement fait pour les 400 ans?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Premièrement, laissez-moi dire un gros merci au député d'Ottawa-Sud. Je le sais un grand francophile et il représente une grande communauté francophone.

Alors, c'est en juin 2013 que nous avons annoncé notre intention de commémorer les 400 ans de présence française en Ontario cette année. Le 25 septembre dernier, nous annonçons à Sudbury 5,9 millions de dollars pour soutenir les projets touristiques, culturels, éducationnels et patrimoniaux. Ces célébrations auront lieu surtout durant l'été, de juin à octobre. Les francophones et les francophiles invitent tous les Ontariens et les Ontariennes à venir célébrer avec nous.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci. Question?

M. John Fraser: Merci à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones pour sa réponse, mais aussi pour son énergie inlassable en matière de francophonie. C'est très excitant de voir tout ce qui se mijote dans la francophonie ontarienne en général, mais aussi dans le cadre du 400^e anniversaire de la présence française en Ontario.

Monsieur le Président, ma question est encore pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Est-ce que la ministre pourrait partager les progrès concernant les activités de célébrations communautaires dans le cadre des 400 ans de présence française en Ontario?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: L'Office des affaires francophones a reçu de nombreuses applications de plusieurs groupes, organisations et municipalités qui partagent un grand intérêt à célébrer le 400^e anniversaire. Le triage des demandes se poursuit. Elles seront analysées sous peu, et on va annoncer ceux qui recevront du financement pour leurs projets.

Je dois dire que j'ai très, très hâte aux célébrations, que ce soit des expositions culturelles et historiques, que ce soit le festival au parc Champlain Huron-Wendat à Penetanguishene—et nous reproduirons les fêtes du 300^e qui ont eu lieu en 1921—le Festival franco-ontarien à Ottawa, la Franco-Fête à Toronto et tant d'autres célébrations.

J'ai aussi assisté tout récemment au lancement du film sur Samuel de Champlain, produit par TFO, le Rêve de Champlain, le 9 mars dernier à Ottawa, et je vous encourage tous à visionner le Rêve de Champlain produit par TFO.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup. Nouvelle question.

SERVICE CLUBS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, last April, I wrote to you after meeting with service clubs in my riding concerning a number of issues that are hindering their everyday operations. On February 19, my resolution on service clubs was debated and passed unanimously with all-party support in this House. The resolution stated, "the Minister of Finance should immediately move to have a standing committee investigate the legislative and regulatory barriers and burdens facing service clubs in Ontario who serve their respective communities and conduct ongoing community service which helps alleviate the demand for publicly-funded services."

Again, Minister, the resolution, as you know, received all-party support. I ask you: When are you going to strike the committee?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member opposite. I welcome the member's interest in discussing service clubs around Ontario and the impact they have on our respective communities. I recognize and value the importance and the role that the service clubs provide in our communities. The member is commended for engaging in this discussion and for looking at the issues that provide some added challenges, many of which are municipal and federal in nature.

But we would like to take the opportunity to remind the member that financial audits certainly are regulations that he has requested to review and potentially modify. We have to do that with respect to the federal government. When it comes to HST and other things for the service clubs, it's something that we're trying to work on with the federal government as well.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member from—I welcome Mr. Wilson's interest in this. He is to be commended. I look forward to discussing this further in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll give you a hint: the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I've been called worse.

As you know, and all members of the House I think would agree, service clubs are the backbone of our communities right across the province. With their dedication to serving so many deserving causes, their sense of community and ability to bring people together, service clubs make Ontario a better place to live and to do business. While alleviating a significant financial burden off your shoulders, Minister, and off the province's shoulders in terms of the good work that they do, they often fill the gaps that government can't do and shouldn't do.

When we got them together—hundreds of service clubs were represented, some individual clubs; some of the people that filled out my survey were responding on behalf of their region—there were a number of issues, as you said, that were federal, and I'm dealing with the federal government on those, taking your advice. You did write me a letter suggesting that. But we need a committee provincially because many more of their issues were provincial matters; some of them small, some of them big.

Make their lives better so they can help other people make their lives better.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I commend the leader of the official opposition of Ontario for the work and the consensus around this Legislative Assembly to do just that. Certainly, when it comes to issues in regard to property tax, as you know, the not-for-profit service clubs are charged at the residential rate as opposed to the commercial rate. Again, we're working with municipalities to try to make it even more effective for those service clubs that provide such a tremendous amount of work for us.

When it comes to gaming and the OLG and some of the things that you've requested in respect to that, we're working with the municipalities to look at the charity casino opportunities for them.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to striking a committee, I encourage all House leaders to put forward something and enable this to take place.

Congratulations for the work you're doing.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Acting Premier. Last week, I asked the Minister of Health to stop deep cuts to surgery in London, but he said he didn't

know the specifics. A week later, it's not just surgeries but thousands of hours of patient care that are being cut. London Health Sciences Centre is eliminating a staggering 97 full-time positions and St. Joseph's is cutting 24 full-time jobs. The Liberals can't say they don't know about cuts to our hospitals that put patients at risk. The real question is: Why doesn't the health minister care, and why doesn't this Liberal government care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I do remember the question from last week with regard to elective surgery. What the member opposite didn't mention at that point in time about that two-week hiatus—in many hospitals around the province, on a scheduled basis, there are closures of surgeries, of operating theatres, for a variety of reasons; this was a scheduled closure for a two-week period, which occurs from time to time. In fact, despite what the member opposite had to say last week, there were no surgeries that were cancelled. There were no surgeries that were scheduled that were cancelled. This was a measure that takes place, as I mentioned, from time to time in hospitals, with the full knowledge of the LHIN as well. It didn't impact patient care. There's no negative impact in terms of ER or other services, and I'm happy to address the other issue in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Acting Premier: Hospitals across the province are laying off front-line nurses and staff because of the Liberal budget cuts. At Grand River Hospital in Kitchener, 45 layoff notices were sent to staff. That announcement came today. That's on top of the 33 layoffs at Cambridge Memorial Hospital last month.

No one believes the spin that front-line job cuts in our hospitals don't hurt patients. Families know that fewer nurses and hospital staff mean one thing: Patients will wait even longer for the care that they need.

1140

When will the Liberals stop these reckless cuts to our hospitals, stop the layoffs in Kitchener and Waterloo and across the province, and stop putting patient care at risk?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think the member opposite knows that layoff notices do not equal layoffs. In many cases, in fact, around the province, from time to time, there are shifts in programs and services. Often there are vacant positions that haven't been filled previously, and those positions are removed so that services can be provided elsewhere within a hospital.

In fact, when layoffs are required for certain programs, often the individuals working in those positions are in fact deployed, as is required, because of representative rights and the union representatives—the model that has been created is that that layoff is required to transfer that individual to another area of the hospital.

But the member opposite does know that we have 24,000 more nurses working in this province than we did approximately a year ago. We have 5,000 more physicians working in the province over the same period of

time. We've increased our funding to hospitals across the province by roughly 50% in the last decade as well.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member from Pickering-Ajax.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Ajax-Pickering.

Interjections.

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is to the Minister of Education.

Interjection: Don't challenge the Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I guess I've been told.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I know that Ontario's publicly funded education system is recognized as one of the best in the world. I'm extremely proud of our accomplishments, as our success has been based on the talent, dedication and hard work of our education community. I know that we are investing in education to ensure that our students continue to achieve excellence, and we have a lot to be proud of, in terms of student achievement.

Just today, both you and the Premier announced that more students are graduating than ever before. This is incredible news. Minister, can you please tell us how our government is helping students graduate with the skills they need to succeed in today's global competitive world?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Ajax-Pickering, although I must admit it was a little hard to hear him over here. But I do think, from what I could hear, that the member is absolutely correct that more students are graduating than ever before.

When we came into office in 2003, only 68% of students were graduating from high school within five years. Today, we announced that 84% of students received their high school diplomas. That's great news. For those of you who weren't quick on the math, that's a 16-percentage-point increase in the graduation rate in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Liz Sandals: That means that 163,000 more students—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: That means that 163,000 more students have graduated than would have if we hadn't increased the grad rate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I might come to the member from Ajax-Pickering on a supplementary, but—no, I think I will.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You are correct both ways, Mr. Speaker, as always.

Thank you, Minister. I know constituents in my riding are pleased to hear that more students than ever are graduating. I know our government continues to invest in schools, and the high graduation rate demonstrates that our government's Student Success Strategy is working.

Minister, this means that our graduation rate is now just one percentage point away from the government's goal of 85% of students graduating. Can you please tell us what steps our government will take to ensure we reach our important goal of 85% of students graduating?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Over the past 10 years, our Student Success Strategy has provided support and resources for students and ensured all high school students have access to learning opportunities that match their future aspirations.

For example, our Specialist High Skills Major program allows 44,000 students to focus on knowledge and skills in various economic sectors. Our Dual Credit Programs have allowed 22,000 students to earn up to four credits that count towards both their high school diploma and a college diploma, degree or apprenticeship.

We've worked very hard to make sure that Ontario students have the chance to develop their strengths, their interests and their goals during their school experience, and we will continue to ensure that students are graduating with the knowledge and skills they need to reach their full potential.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron-Bruce on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I would like to welcome Mary Anne and Jim Batte to Queen's Park. They made the trek to Toronto from my riding; they're good friends and neighbours of ours from the Formosa, Teeswater and Belmore area.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nickel Belt on a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wish to correct my record: On March 26, I referred to the Herzig Eye Institute as an independent health facility; they are not.

VISITEUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa-Orléans on a point of order.

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Il me fait grand plaisir de présenter Andrée-Anne Martel qui est ici de l'Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario. Elle est ici pour une présentation au caucus de la francophonie.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Transportation on a point of order.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think everyone in the Legislature knows that we are 100 days away today from the official start of the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games. I just want to make sure—though I know every member of the House would be aware that the Pan Am/Parapan Am medals are actually here in the Legislature today. I'm sure many have already been to see them, but for those who haven't, they are on display until 1:30 today in committee room 228.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a number of introductions today: Mr. Muhammad Masood Alam, the 2015 award winner for the Agnes Macphail Award; Mr. Geoff Kettel, the 2008 Agnes Macphail winner; Tim Progosh, who is a representative of the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame; Shamsul Muktadir, who is the president of Crescent Town Community Inc.; and Brian Dunstan, who is here as a good friend. Two of the five are here, anyway; they will be here shortly. Good to see you here. Thanks.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? Further introductions? Last call for introductions. The member for Ajax–Pickering, for an introduction or are you just waving to me?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce my wife, Donna, who is not yet in the gallery. It's very unusual that she would ever be late, but traffic must have been busy—

Interjection: She's coming in.

Interjection: There she is.

Applause.

Mr. Joe Dickson: The Speaker once told me, sir, that timing is everything. Thank you to my beautiful wife, Donna.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Is that the best wife he ever had?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I really enjoy my afternoons.

Introduction of guests? Last call for introduction of guests.

It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MICHAEL PICHE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to focus on a story of heroism from my riding. Local news reports have chronicled the rescue of a man and his dog last week from the icy Ottawa River in Mattawa by OPP constable Michael Piche. Roch Halle had gone out to try to rescue his seven-year-old Irish setter Zoe, who'd gotten stuck in the ice. The ice gave way, and he spent 10 minutes trapped in the frigid waters before Constable Piche, who was on patrol nearby, heard his cries for help, crawled out on his stomach and pulled both the man and his dog to safety, shortly after going through the ice himself up to his waist.

It must be noted that this isn't the first rescue that involves Constable Piche. In December 2011, he was credited with rescuing a woman from drowning in the same Mattawa River. In 2012, Constable Piche was awarded a Diamond Jubilee medal by our MP, Jay Aspin,

for the constable's service to the community, which now spans some 17 years.

Courageous acts deserve to be recognized in this Legislature, and that's why it is important to bring the story of Constable Michael Piche to you today.

RAIL SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today I would like to talk about the two train derailments that occurred in and near Gogama, in my riding. The first was on February 14, the second on March 7. CN has released more than 25 updates since then. On the government side, there are zero public reports available, despite the fact that life for the people of Gogama and the surrounding area has changed for generations to come.

The government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, and they do this in part by using their full power to prosecute offenders until they learn, until they change their ways and realize that there cannot be a next time. There have to be huge consequences to these repeated derailments, or they are going to keep happening.

I am convinced that if this derailment, those explosions, that fire, that spill of toxic bitumen had happened in southern Ontario, things would have been different. To start, the Premier would have come to see the residents, and a full prevention plan would be in development. Hundreds of government lawyers would be preparing litigation.

The people in Mattagami First Nation are important to me. Come and see what happened. Come and meet them. See the scarred landscape. See the environmental destruction, and you will understand the need for government action.

MUHAMMAD MASOOD ALAM

Mr. Arthur Potts: On Tuesday, March 24, the 22nd annual Agnes Macphail Award ceremony was held at East York Civic Centre. Agnes Macphail, as we all know, was the first woman elected to the House of Commons, and then at 43 she was elected as MPP, representing the riding of York East, an area that includes Beaches–East York, making her one of the first women in the provincial assembly.

As evidenced here today, many women have followed her. Agnes was a strong defender of women's rights and supported the passage of Ontario's first equal pay legislation. She's also known as a strong promoter of social justice, coining the expression, "Think globally but act locally."

The award we have from Agnes Macphail was first started in 1994 and is given out to a resident of East York who exemplifies her leadership. This year I had the honour of sitting in on the selection committee and voting for this year's winner, Mr. Muhammad Masood Alam, who joins us in the House today.

Applause.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you. Mr. Alam is from Karachi, Pakistan, where he was taught by his father

from a young age to always give back to the community. Masood and his wife continue to pass on his father's message. His list of volunteer work in East York is exemplary. He has been a leader in strongly advocating against family violence. He educates the vulnerable and less fortunate to access resources. He initiated a program called Rabita that is designed to promote anti-bullying and promote healthy living in the neighbourhood. And he's involved with the Toronto police community crisis response program.

Mr. Alam has been quoted as saying, "In Canada, I found a lot of opportunities to volunteer my time for those that don't have enough opportunities." I commend Mr. Alam for his positive attitude. We all know people like Masood who make our communities great.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and my colleagues to join me in thanking Masood Alam for all he has done and continues to do to make this community a better place. He's a very deserving winner of the 2015 Agnes Macphail Award. Thank you, Masood.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome and thank our guest.

MINOR HOCKEY

Ms. Laurie Scott: There is no doubt that my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock produces great hockey talent. As the 2014-15 hockey season comes to a close, I would like to take a moment and congratulate a few teams on their very successful seasons.

On Saturday, March 21, the Mariposa Lightning won the all-Ontario Peewee C championship in Little Britain. Led by coach Trevor Rogers and assistant coach Robert Jenkins, the Lightning won 4-3 in a close game against the Six Nations Blackhawks. Congratulations to the whole team on their big win.

This past Saturday in Minden, the Highland Storm Peewee boys won the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship. The Storm made a triumphant comeback to beat Ingersoll 4-2, scoring four unanswered goals in the third period. I would like to congratulate head coach Jason Morissette and the whole team on their win and successful season.

Finally, not to be outdone, the Highland Storm Midget girls won a title of their own. They took home the gold in the Lower Lakes Female Hockey League championships in a 1-0 win over the Flamborough Flames. Congratulations to coach Dan Marsden and all the girls on this fantastic win.

PAKISTAN DAY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Windsor is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the most multicultural country on earth. We all take pride in the achievement we have made as Canadians and as Ontarians.

Multiculturalism is embedded in the fabric of Canada and Ontario. It is enshrined in the charter, in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, and in Ontario in the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act.

Immigrants from many different parts of the world have settled in Windsor and made it their home. Each community joins the family of Canadians and adds to our nation the rich traditions of their country of origin and enhances our proudly diverse community in Windsor.

This past weekend, the fourth annual flag-raising ceremony held to commemorate Pakistan Day, a public holiday held on March 23 in Pakistan each year, took place in my riding of Windsor West. The Pakistan community in Windsor, going back to the 1960s and before, has done its part in enhancing the wonderful, vibrant and diverse face our city presents to Ontario, to Canada and to the world. Now hundreds of families from Pakistan proudly call Windsor their home.

The Windsor celebration is a chance to promote the Pakistani culture and heritage to Canadian-born Pakistani children, as dozens of children ran around waving Pakistani flags and took part in singing their parents' homeland's national anthem, as well as the Canadian national anthem. They should be proud of their heritage and their valued place in Canadian society. Today I am honoured to extend my congratulations to everyone from Windsor's Pakistani community.

1510

HOLY WEEK

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further members' statements? The member from—

from Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Whatever you say is correct, Mr. Speaker.

Like everyone in this House, I annually honour all places of worship, whether they are Tamil, Muslim, Hindu or Jewish observances, just to name a few, including ceremonies of Thai Pongal, Ramadan, Eid-UI-Fitr—which marks the end of Ramadan—Holi, Diwali, Yom Kippur, Passover and Rosh Hashanah.

However, this week, which has commenced with Palm Sunday, is Holy Week worldwide. Over 2.18 billion Christians this weekend will celebrate the most important observances of our Christian faith: Good Friday on April 3 and Easter Sunday on April 5. Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his death at Calgary—Western Canada will love that—at Calvary, with mother Mary at his feet as he died.

Good Friday represents the sacrifices and sufferings in Jesus's life and the selfless acts from a man free from sin to save those full of sin. They also placed a crown of thorns on his head, causing further pain and suffering, also piercing his side with a lance, ensuring his death.

The crucifixion was the culmination of a number of events in Holy Week, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday, two days following the crucifixion, and his ascension into heaven 40 days later. Easter Sunday is the celebration of our Lord rising from the dead and proving once and for all that he is the son of God.

Holy Week, including the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, is observed throughout the Christian world, and Catholics in Ontario alone will pray in some 30 languages this Easter weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. God bless you.

EUGENE GEORGE

Mr. Michael Harris: It's with deepest sadness that I stand to join those across Waterloo region mourning the passing of local icon Mr. Eugene George. A dedicated man who committed himself to growing and strengthening his community, Kitchener Rangers club founder and first president Eugene George sadly left us last night after a battle with cancer.

Those who knew him will tell you that while community filled his heart, Eugene's passion was hockey, a passion that saw him bring the New York Rangers to Kitchener in 1963. Once accomplished, Mr. George established community ownership, a vision providing the foundation of the Kitchener Rangers organization ever since.

When he wasn't talking, working or playing hockey, he was busy, always busy. As the founder of G&A Masonry, a business he grew from Breslau right across North America over more than 60 years, Eugene became the first president of the Canadian and Ontario Masonry Contractors' Association and the first Canadian president of the Mason Contractors Association of America.

Speaker, this was a man who embraced his work to the point that it was his hobby, a hobby he dedicated himself to 24/7. I remember receiving calls from Eugene on a Sunday morning. I would phone him back expecting to leave a message and connect with him on Monday, but he was there, Eugene, on a Sunday afternoon, doing what he enjoyed most: working in the office alongside his boys.

In fact, he was still in that same office as recently as Monday. In one of those calls last year he told me how he had broken his shin playing hockey, trying to clear traffic in front of the net at the ripe age of over 80. Days later, he was still complaining about those guys jamming the crease.

I ask those in the Legislature and across our province today to join in recognizing the passing of Mr. Eugene George.

AGINCOURT COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to recognize a school in my riding. Agincourt Collegiate Institute, the oldest high school in Scarborough, has a long history of excellent music programs, and they had impressive results at this year's music competitions.

At the 2015 Kiwanis festival, ACI received awards in all categories, taking home seven awards for first place, five for second place and one for third place. At the GTA Jazz Festival, ACI received two gold and two silver awards. And both the ACI wind symphony and wind ensemble received gold medals at the Ontario Band Association festival.

I wish ACI students the best of luck in their upcoming competitions at the Ontario Vocal Festival and MusicFest nationals.

Mr. Speaker, music programs stimulate students' creativity and enhance their personal, social and educational development.

I'd like to thank the principal, Roy Hu; the head of the music program, David Lum; the music parent council; and other teachers and staff for supporting the development of young musicians in Scarborough–Agincourt.

FIFA WOMEN'S
WORLD CUP TROPHY TOURTOURNÉE DU TROPHÉE
DE LA COUPE DU MONDE FÉMININE
DE LA FIFA

Mr. John Fraser: This summer, Canada will be welcoming some of the best soccer players from around the world for the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Cet été, le Canada accueillera les meilleures joueuses de soccer du monde entier pour la Coupe du Monde Féminine de la FIFA 2015.

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to host teams from 24 countries that will compete for one of sport's most desired trophies.

In the coming months leading up to the tournament, FIFA and Coca-Cola Canada will be taking the Women's World Cup trophy on a 12-stop tour across the country. The trophy tour, which begins today in my hometown of Ottawa, will give Ontarians a chance to get up close and personal with the Women's World Cup in cities like Kingston, Toronto and Hamilton.

The first ever FIFA Women's World Cup Trophy Tour is a great opportunity to learn more about Canada's number one participation sport and to recognize our high-performance athletes.

The tour also represents a great opportunity to celebrate the important role that sports play in our lifestyle and wellness.

As the parliamentary assistant to health, I recognize the power that sport has to inspire our communities, and especially our young people, to become more active.

Monsieur le Président, j'encourage tout le monde à participer à l'un des événements qui commencent aujourd'hui jusqu'au 31 mai, et à encourager l'équipe de soccer du Canada cet été.

I encourage everyone to get out to one of the 12 trophy stops being held until May 31 and to cheer on Canada's women's soccer team to victory this summer.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr15, An Act to revive DSPT International (Canada) Inc.

Bill Pr16, An Act to revive 990046 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive 731149 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Soo Wong: I beg leave to present a report on pre-budget consultation 2015 from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Soo Wong: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted pre-budget consultations from January 20 to January 30 this past winter. Public hearings were held in Fort Frances, Sudbury, Ottawa, Cornwall, Fort Erie and London, and included two days in Toronto at the Legislative Assembly. The committee heard from 168 witnesses and received some 155 written submissions from agencies, associations, community groups, local administrative bodies, municipalities, organizations, transfer payment partners, unions and individuals. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank each and every one of them for taking part to share their views with the committee.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee and the committee staff for their commitment, hard work and co-operation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Hon. Liz Sandals: Today I am pleased to stand in the House to raise awareness for the International Day of Pink, which is next Wednesday, April 8.

As members of this Legislature know, the International Day of Pink was started when a young man in ninth grade was bullied for wearing a pink shirt in a Nova Scotia high school. But two students took action by buying pink shirts and handing them out to friends to wear to school. To their surprise, hundreds of students wore pink to show support for the bullied student. By doing so, they stood up against bullying and showed that it was unacceptable in their school.

Today, I want to recognize schools across Ontario that are taking steps to raise awareness of the impact of

bullying and are promoting safe, inclusive and accepting environments in our schools every day. I especially want to thank all of our young people who will organize Pink Shirt Days in their schools across Ontario next Wednesday. Together, we are part of one voice that says we will not accept bullying, harassment, discrimination or hatred in our schools or in our society.

In particular, I want to recognize and thank the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity—which was formerly known as Jer's Vision—Egale, Kids Help Phone, and many other organizations for leading the way on bullying prevention initiatives across Ontario and Canada.

Speaker, while we have taken important steps to prevent and address bullying in our schools, we know that there are still too many students who feel unsafe and unwelcome. Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or questioning are often the targets of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia at school. Sadly, we all know the tragic impact that this can have.

For our students to do well in school, they must feel safe and accepted. For this reason, I am proud that our government has been a leader in bullying prevention and intervention. We led the way by developing robust legislation, such as the Accepting Schools Act, and by developing resources for school boards that address bullying and victimization through prevention, intervention, and support.

The Accepting Schools Act, introduced in 2012, was the first of its kind in Canada. The act provides a definition of bullying and cyberbullying and requires school boards to take measures to prevent and address inappropriate student behaviour.

Putting an end to bullying cannot be done by one person alone. It is the responsibility of everyone in the school community to ensure that our schools are safe, inclusive and accepting for all. That's why it is important that our schools work with parents, students and staff in developing policies to prevent bullying in our schools and classrooms.

As a complement to our efforts on accepting schools, our government has also expanded supports for children and youth with mental health issues. We know that often those are related to being the victim of bullying.

We have added resources for educators to support students' mental health and promote well-being as part of Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

We're also continuing our partnership with Kids Help Phone so that our young people can have access to 24/7 telephone and Web-based professional counselling services.

And, Speaker, just last month, our government took further steps towards ending bullying by releasing the revised, up-to-date health and physical education curriculum. We needed to update our curriculum so that students understand the importance of things like healthy relationships; having the confidence to say no; safe use of technology and the Internet to help eliminate cyber-

bullying; developing inclusive communities; and learning about mental health.

It is the responsibility of everyone to speak out against bullying. Inappropriate behaviour such as bullying, cyberbullying, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia and biphobia is unacceptable. We must continue to work together to promote the health and well-being of our students and ensure that they continue to learn in a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment.

In closing, I hope that all members will recognize the International Day of Pink next Wednesday and show their support by wearing something pink. Together we can help foster a culture of safety, acceptance and inclusiveness in our schools and in our society.

Now, Speaker, I happen to know that my critic the member from Simcoe North has on a very good bullying prevention T-shirt today. I also know that usually we do not allow people to wear slogans in the Legislature, but this is such an appropriate T-shirt for what he is about to do that I would like to move unanimous consent that the member from Simcoe North be allowed to remove his jacket so we can all see his T-shirt.

Interjections: Take it off!

Hon. Liz Sandals: Not take the T-shirt off! Take the jacket off!

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education is seeking unanimous consent for the member from Simcoe North to disrobe.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Partially. Partially.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Partially? Partially. Just give me a da-da-da-da moment, please. Don't interject.

Agreed? Agreed. I thank the minister.

I must continue my trend. Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries. It is now—

Hon. Liz Sandals: We want to see your T-shirt.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): He was given permission. It didn't say he had to.

It is now time for responses. The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I am responding. I'll take it off in a minute.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay, I'll take it off right now. Okay?

Applause.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much for an opportunity to respond to the Minister of Education on the International Day of Pink. I think it's really important that I make a few comments on what has happened in the riding of Simcoe North.

Immediately after the International Day of Pink was mentioned, and we had the young fellow from Nova Scotia and those comments were made, a number of things happened in the riding of Simcoe North. We have a group called the Orillia Youth Centre, that's run by a gentleman named Kevin Gangloff. It's operated by the city of Orillia and, in fact, for years now they have been

concerned about bullying in society, so they've taken a leadership role in our community.

A gentleman came along named Ross McIntyre. He's another person working in the city of Orillia, and he decided to create this theme. It's called "Stand Up! Orillia Against Bullying." What he did is, he came to—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: What am I doing this for, anyways?

He came to different supporters of that, supporters of the youth centre, and asked us all to buy pink T-shirts through our organization. I think each year now, for about five years, each different supporter has bought about 300 shirts each year, and we distribute them to kids in the elementary school, the secondary school, the Lakehead campus in Orillia and also to Georgian College. Georgian College is also a sponsor of this program.

It has gone over very well, to the point where we've also got different people, Mr. Speaker—for example, a couple of years back, Arlo Guthrie came to town to speak at the Mariposa Folk Festival. He came and made sure that he spoke to the group about bullying and how he'd seen it in society. He asked questions, and got a lot of media attention with all the different TV stations in the area, because he was playing at the Mariposa Folk Festival.

Last fall we had Chuck Panozzo. He's the original founder of the rock group Styx. Charles is not a healthy man today. He has had cancer and has HIV. He was bullied as a child, and thank God he had an older brother who protected him in high school. He was ready to go into a teaching career, and just about the time he was supposed to start his first job, he decided he was going to start a rock band. It was a very successful rock band. Styx has played around the world for 25 or 30 years now.

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He came to the youth centre in Orillia as well. It was arranged by a gentleman named Marc Cohen, from Orillia. He spoke to the kids all around the community and drew a huge crowd. That night, the band played; they put on a phenomenal performance. We were allowed to go backstage with the band and had our picture taken and all that sort of thing. On the stage, he wore this T-shirt: "Stand Up! Orillia Against Bullying." I think that's a phenomenal thing that he did. I think that the Orillia group has done remarkable work throughout the years, and I wanted to give them special attention today. I thought I'd wear this to the photo op, but I missed the photo op. I didn't know the minister would ask me for sure to do a unanimous consent motion to remove my jacket—and that's nice.

Also, I want to say, because I've got a minute left, that the bullying aspect is one of the reasons, as education critic, that I tried to work with my caucus to convince them to work with the health and physical education curriculum changes, and mainly the sex education curriculum, because there is bullying: the transgender bullying, the gay and lesbian bullying, the cyberbullying, the Internet luring. With these things, it's not just about

what a teacher teaches the kids about sexuality; it's about all the things leading up to the fact that you do not want young men and women to be into this case where they're bullying someone else.

I think that as children most of us have probably bullied someone or been bullied ourselves. But if we can stop it at a very early age, even today, it will protect many, many people into the future.

I'm a strong supporter of international pink shirt day. I applaud and thank the minister for her comments.

By the way, my name is on the back of this shirt. It's actually: Garfield Dunlop, MPP, Georgian College and a skateboard park.

The reality is that we all support it and we support anti-bullying day and we support international pink shirt day. Thank you very much for the opportunity today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The member from Simcoe North is a tough act to follow.

It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the New Democratic caucus and speak to the International Day of Pink this year. By standing up to bullying and discrimination today, we are working towards a more accepting Ontario tomorrow. I think the popularity of the Day of Pink speaks volumes to its success and the hard work of organizers, activists and communities across the province. I want to thank everyone who has organized an event next week for all of their efforts. Organizations like Jer's Vision, Egale, Queer Ontario and the Trans Lobby Group are leaders in the fight against homophobia, sexism, racism, transphobia and discrimination in all its forms.

The fight against bullying and discrimination is no easy task and there is no one target. Indeed, it is an effort to change what's accepted and seen as normal in society, rather than trying to change someone to fit into society constructed norms. We need to challenge anything and everything that asks us to change who we are to appease others' expectations of us. This cannot be more true than when we are talking about Ontarians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer.

To this day, there are discriminatory practices in this province that would shock the conscience of most Ontarians. So-called conversion therapy is one such practice. Conversion or reparative therapy is based on medically discredited practices adhering to the distorted belief that you can prevent youth from being LGBTQ. Right now there are medical professionals in this province who are charging OHIP to practise this therapy on youth for what they see as a treatment for a mental illness. The twisted beliefs of a few doctors and counsellors who think they can "fix" LGBTQ youth perpetuate discrimination against these individuals. To quote Ohio trans teen Leelah Alcorn, who experienced a level of discrimination so severe that it resulted in her suicide, "Fix society. Please."

Recently the Canadian Mental Health Association found that 20% of trans respondents have experienced physical or sexual assaults and 34% were subject to

verbal threats or harassment. The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they contemplated suicide and 45% had attempted suicide at some point.

New Democrats will not stand for the medical quackery that is conversion therapy, and my colleague from Parkdale–High Park has pioneered legislation to stop this practice. Bill 77 seeks to ensure health professionals reject any attempts to prevent a youth from being LGBTQ. It also affirms the right of youth to self-identify. I hope that all members of this chamber understand that an option to complain to the CPSO is insufficient in combatting discrimination against LGBTQ youth.

We need Bill 77 to be enacted into law. Already, as a result of this bill and the tireless efforts of LGBTQ activists, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has launched a complete review of their treatment of trans youth. This bill has secured tremendous support from medical professionals and their accredited organizations. Jake Pyne of McMaster University stated that the member from Parkdale–High Park is sending a strong message to health and mental health practitioners in this province. The Canadian Psychological Association affirms that all adolescent and adult persons have the right to define their gender identity, regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex or initial gender role.

Speaker, it's fitting that Bill 77 is up for debate tomorrow, followed by the International Day of Pink next week. I hope that this government will follow the lead of activists working with New Democrats to advocate for LGBTQ youth and support this bill. With all of the great strides that the Day of Pink has made in the fight against discrimination, I hope the passing of this bill will be the next positive step forward to building acceptance throughout the province.

PETITIONS

LYME DISEASE

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

"Whereas Ontario does not have a strategy on Lyme disease; and

"Whereas the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing an Action Plan on Lyme Disease; and

"Whereas Toronto Public Health says that transmission of the disease requires the tick to be attached for 24 hours, so early intervention and diagnosis is of primary importance; and

"Whereas a motion was introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario encouraging the government to adopt a strategy on Lyme disease, while taking into account the impact the disease has upon individuals and families in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to develop an integrated strategy on Lyme disease

consistent with the action plan of the Public Health Agency of Canada, taking into account available treatments, accessibility issues and the efficacy of the currently available diagnostic mechanisms. In so doing, it should consult with representatives of the health care community and patients' groups within one year."

I agree with this petition. I sign my name to it and give it to page Kari.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition named "Ontario Is Not For Sale."

"Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO); and

"Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of" good-paying "Ontario jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools; and

"Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hard-working Ontarians who are building this province; and

"Whereas Ontario is stronger when there is shared prosperity;

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

"Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands."

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

ENERGY POLICIES

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

"Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as 'an extra payment covered by ratepayers over and above the actual market price of electricity'; and

"Whereas wind power is simply unreliable, blows mostly at night when we don't need power, creating a surplus Ontario then has to get rid of by paying Quebec and the United States to take it, and the total cost of producing the exported power was about \$2.6 billion more than the revenue Ontario received from exporting that power between 2006 and 2013; and

"Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has risen from \$700 million prior to the Green Energy Act to \$7.7 billion by 2013, and over the past decade, the cumulated amount is about \$50 billion; and

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"Whereas Ontario now has the highest industrial rates in North America, and residential hydro bills are forecast to increase" by a further "42% by 2018 after peak hydro rates have already more than tripled since 2003; and

"Whereas local First Nations, property owners and aviation and aerospace industry stakeholders have voiced concerns about wind farm installations proposed by Innergex in Merrick and Mattawan townships in the riding of Nipissing;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on these proposed wind projects and the government's expensive energy policy by cancelling feed-in-tariff ... subsidies, implementing an immediate moratorium on wind power development, and giving municipalities veto authority over wind projects in their communities."

I wholeheartedly agree with all the hundreds of these and hand it to page Max.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Mr. Stefan Skogberg from Copper Cliff, in the riding of Sudbury. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Dickson: I wish to present a petition to the Legislature of Ontario.

"Whereas the community of Windsor-Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I attach my signature to it, and I will pass it to Jessie.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn’t necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 per household more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

“Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

“Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

“Whereas this uncompetitive tax will not impact business outside Ontario and will only serve to accelerate the demise of our once strong manufacturing sector; and

“Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

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

“To abandon the idea of yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses.”

I agree with this and will be passing it to page Thomas.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas by 2017, close to one third of Ontario’s population will be made up of peoples of colour and First Peoples; and

“Whereas racialized communities are overrepresented when it comes to issues of income inequality, un(der)employment and precarious employment; and

“Whereas the Ontario government used to have an Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat to address persistent racial inequalities and inequities in the province; and

“Whereas there currently does not exist a dedicated section or division that provides focus for government action on issues of concern to racialized people in this province; and

“Whereas the Colour of Poverty/Colour of Change Network, the Racism Free Ontario campaign by Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), and other like-minded groups are working to create broader public awareness so that Ontarians accept and acknowledge that racism (systemic, structural, institutional, interpersonal and individualized) is still alive in our province;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish an Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate, to also initiate a task force to address racism in Ontario and incorporate an anti-racism framework in the development of government policy, and to do so with comprehensive community engagement so as to develop practical and sustainable solutions to redressing all forms of systemic and interpersonal racism.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Joe to deliver.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from Charlene Bradley in my riding, in Hanmer. It goes as follows:

“Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane, 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 as follows:

“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 petition, will affix my name to it and ask Connor to bring it to the Clerk.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

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

“Whereas accessibility to our public health care system is a foundational value of Ontario; and

“Whereas all individuals should have equal access to health care services regardless of their ability to pay; and

“Whereas patients requiring health care services often have to drive to a hospital to receive these services; and

“Whereas hospitals are increasingly using parking charges as an avenue for revenue generation thereby impacting some patients’ access based on their ability to pay; and

“Whereas the Liberal Party promised during the 2014 election campaign to cap hospital parking fees;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the government of Ontario follow through on the commitment to cap parking fees at Ontario’s hospitals at a level that ensures equitable access to health care.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I’m going to give it to page Natasha to bring to the Clerk.

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

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

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired that have no known cause or cure;

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

“Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges and there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

“Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

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

“To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research.”

I agree with this, sign my name to it and give it to page Japneet.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Anne-Marie MacInnis, the president of Unifor Mine Mill Local 598, and it reads as follows:

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“Whereas Health Sciences North is facing major direct care cuts, including: the closure of beds on the surgical unit, cuts to vital patient support services,” such as cleaning, “and more than 87,000 nursing and direct patient care hours per year to be cut from departments across the hospital, including in-patient psychiatry, day surgery, the surgical units, obstetrics, mental health services, oncology, critical care and the emergency department; and

“Whereas Ontario’s provincial government has cut hospital funding in real dollar terms for the last eight years in a row; and

“Whereas these cuts will risk higher medical accident rates as nursing and direct patient care hours are dramatically cut and will reduce levels of care all across our hospital;

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

“(1) Stop the proposed cuts to Health Sciences North and protect the beds and services;

“(2) Improve overall hospital funding in Ontario with a plan to increase funding at least to the average of other provinces.”

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

OSTOMY SUPPLIES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the \$600 ADP ostomy grant has not been revised in a decade;

“Whereas Ontarians who require ostomy supplies are facing increased supplies costs that significantly affect their ability to pay for basic needs such as food and shelter;

“Whereas all Ontarians deserve to receive the care and supplies required to maintain their independence and quality of life,

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

“To increase the ostomy supply grant under the Assistive Devices Program to appropriately reflect the increased costs of ostomy supplies for patients.”

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Rahul.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

VISITOR

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence has a point of order.

Mr. Mike Colle: If I could introduce a member sitting in the gallery here: He’s a local Catholic school trustee, Frank D’Amico. He’s also a member of the Toronto Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery reserves. I’d like to welcome him to Queen’s Park.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES RÉGIMES DE PENSION AGRÉÉS COLLECTIFS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 57, Loi créant un cadre pour les régimes de pension agréés collectifs et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe the last time this was discussed, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo had the floor. Member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to continue the debate my colleague from Oshawa had started on Tuesday. This is an important debate for this House to be having, because it does speak to the priorities and the economy of this province.

I'm going to be talking a little bit about why defined benefits are actually the preferred model around pensions. I'm going to be referring mostly from the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan report. They put out a report this month—on March 17, actually—called Retirement Income Crisis: Inevitable or Avoidable?—The Economic Reality. This research study is actually something that the government should be paying very close attention to in light of them sort of fast-tracking Bill 57, which is the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act of 2014, originally.

The reason I want to address this is because it speaks to the importance of designing pension plans that will actually meet the goals that we all want. I think that we all share the goals of seeing a pension plan which will guarantee a certain level of quality of life, a certain level of income, as people retire, because there is growing consensus in this province and in this country that people obviously have not had the vehicles or the tools to save. Clearly, in light of an economy where we in Ontario have the highest youth unemployment rate in Canada, this is a huge wakeup call, I think, for the majority of people.

But we did meet with the president of HOOPP—his name is Jim Keohane—and this white paper actually serves as a guide, I think. It's quite a contrast, though, to the TD report that came out yesterday, the TD economic report affirming the government's position on public-private partnerships. I know that it's shocking for the majority of people in this province to hear that a bank is actually confirming that they really like that \$6.5 billion in financing that comes with the alternative financing procurement process that the Auditor General of this province raised the alarm about, just before Christmas. That \$6.5 billion that's contained in her report—no one is disputing that. Those are the credit card rates that this government engages in, in order to fund infrastructure.

Just think what we could do with that \$6.5 billion. The \$8 billion is the more popular number, but the \$6.5 billion is indisputable. Nobody is challenging that.

It's not surprising, though, that the Toronto-Dominion Bank came out yesterday with this report and it just happens to reaffirm this government's position.

The banks are happy. The banks are doing fine. You know who's not doing fine? The majority of lower- and middle-income Ontarians in this province, who obviously are having a hard time finding good jobs in this economy and are certainly having a very difficult time even planning to save for the future.

The white paper that HOOPP put out, as I said, is called Retirement Income Crisis: Inevitable or Avoidable? They summarize two studies that approach the economic reality of retirement from two different perspectives.

I really do hope that whoever is writing the framework for this government on Bill 57—and Bill 56, for that matter—is listening very carefully.

In the Boston Consulting Group's study on defined benefit pension plans, they confirm that these plans “play a significant role in powering economies, supporting growth and creating confident consumers whose spending is vital to the health of our economies. Of equal note is the research conducted by the Gandalf Group which found that the majority of Ontarians (86%) agree there is an emerging retirement income crisis in Canada.

“The findings are clear. In Ontario alone, approximately 1.3 million defined pensioners inject an estimated \$27 billion back into the economy, with this impact most keenly felt in smaller communities where there is greater reliance on the predictable and secure retirement income offered through the” defined “pension model.”

I want the members in the House to pay really close attention to that because the evidence, the research, points to the fact that those smaller communities, those rural communities, our northern communities benefit even more. They're more reliant on a strong pension plan, and it has a greater and positive impact on those local economies. I think that's something we haven't yet talked about in this House.

With this research, I think that this House, this Legislature, has an opportunity to better understand the economic realities for those with a defined pension and for those without—we should talking about that—and for Ontarians as a whole. I believe defined pension plans provide the most effective and efficient way to deliver retirement security.

It's important that the pension reform debate focuses on the most serious issue, which is ensuring solutions are found that provide retirement income adequacy for all Ontarians. Bill 57 does not do that, because with Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, there is no defined benefit at the end of the day. It's completely dependent on the market. Of course, the management fees carve out of the pension benefit, especially at the end of it.

I firmly believe, of course, that research should guide public policy. We should be looking at and listening to

the voices in this sector who have the experience to help design a plan going forward for this government.

I think it is significant, of course, that this government has brought Bill 57 first and foremost, and it seems to be the priority, because the much-talked-about made-in-Ontario option is not coming forward for years now. I think we have some consensus, so why not design the best model now?

HOOPP came and they did a presentation. I think it's really important when organizations who have direct experience in this field come to Queen's Park, expend the energy and share their knowledge. That benefits us as members, because sometimes we get into this stage where if we just paid attention to the voices in this House, we would be in a lot of trouble, and we would design policies and legislation which actually go off the tracks.

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HOOPP actually had this report. They indicated that the percentage of the labour force covered by defined benefit plans dropped from 39% to 29% by the time we reached 2010. Most of the drop was in the private sector, which is really interesting. Therefore, that's why you have this tension between those who have pensions and those who do not. And I think that this could commonly be called—

Mr. John Yakubuski: Pension tension.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's pension envy, but there is tension there; I'll give you that.

This report is really relevant today, because the report is on converting public sector defined benefits to defined contributions: *The Experience So Far and Implications*. There is this concern that governments south of the border and across the country, and obviously here in Ontario with this debate—the focus is moving to the defined contribution model, which has a lot of weaknesses, I know, and it's a concern for us.

Defined contribution plans are more expensive for the same level of benefits as defined benefit plans—this is the summary of the findings—and the main cause is the level of net investment returns, but also high admin costs, and I think the member from Oshawa really did drive that home. I use the example that if one of the plans is showing a 5% growth and 3% of that is management fees and 2% of that is inflation, the positive net gain is negligible at best. So why go down that road, Mr. Speaker? The switch to defined contributions would mean higher contributions from employers, taxpayers and employees. We have some examples of plans that actually can be designed to be more beneficial to the pensioner.

To convert public sector defined benefits to defined contributions—HOOPP describes this as a lose-lose. They describe it as lose-lose because investments move to shorter-term, more liquid assets that earn lower returns. This is basic Finance 101. Legacy liabilities would be around for 70 or more years even with a hard freeze. For the model, a \$10-billion public sector defined benefit plan, costs to governments would rise 38%. It could be met with a one-time payment into the plan of

\$3.29 billion. This is a de-risking of the plan. This is what leadership is: actually designing the best plan at the beginning, not picking up the pieces at the end of it.

I think it's worth noting that HOOPP, on March 4, 2015, had a 17.71% return for their members. That's not too shabby, Mr. Speaker. That's because they can control their costs, because they have the right expertise in investing, and those management fees are not carving out the benefits at the end of the day.

There's obviously room for improvement. I can talk at length about the flaws of Bill 57 and, quite honestly, why we're not going to be supporting this piece of legislation.

Pooled registered pension plans are supposed to be very large funds designed to keep fees low, but the legislation leaves the setting of acceptable fees to regulation. Obviously, there are some trust issues on that front. The CPP Investment Board, like large provincial public sector workplace pension plans, the defined benefit plans I've been talking about, has managed to keep administration costs very low. This makes them a better sponsor than the insurance industry and the banks for a retirement savings vehicle.

The second flaw is that there are no employer obligations to contribute to PRPPs. Workers are pretty much on their own in terms of contributions. If you're paying attention to the financial reality of the people in this province, they are struggling to make ends meet. The expendable income at the end of the day, especially with increasing hydro rates—even the renters, those people are who in a situation where they have to rent or sometimes they choose to rent—their rent keeps going up. The cost of living keeps going up, the cost of energy keeps going up, and their wages are stagnant in the face of inflation. Expendable income, solely on the part of the individual—and not recognizing that planning for a healthy future actually is a shared responsibility and that government can and should play a responsible role in that—is pretty much ignored in Bill 57.

Thirdly, there is no defined or even target benefit with PRPPs. Workers end up with whatever the market returns on their cumulative contributions when they retire. So there's a huge unknown attributed to Bill 57, that people cannot plan for the future because they don't know what the pension buyout is going to be because it's up to the market.

Fourth, it is not clear how fiduciary rules will work. Will the banks and the insurance firms who administer PRPPs be permitted to invest the funds and all of those investment products that they sell themselves?

These are outstanding questions, and I would think that whoever had written this piece of legislation would have at least put some plans in place for that or had some clarity. This is an issue that is consistent, actually, with this government, that they continue to bring pieces of legislation forward which have serious gaps in rationale and serious gaps in the design.

So we obviously have some serious concerns with Bill 57, and for good reason. The fact of the matter is that Ontario does have a retirement savings crisis, but the

answer is not yet another private sector savings vehicle. That's our position. We would rather see this government design a pension plan which (1) is affordable; (2) actually has some guarantees going forward; and (3) finds efficiencies of cost, a streamlined design to ensure that those management fees don't cut into the pension going forward.

Ontarians without workplace pension plans need a responsible, enhanced CPP. Obviously, this is the first choice. But that kind of leadership is not going to come from Mr. Harper. Mr. Harper, right now, is very fixated on Bill C-51, which should have everybody in this country standing up and protesting because it's a piece of legislation which will undermine the very essence of this country. I think that my counterparts on the other side of the House may find some consensus on that.

That's the ironic part about this. The federal government has gone down a very similar road. They've modelled the pooled registered pension plan at the federal level and the provincial government has just followed their lead. That's a little disappointing. The priority should be designing the best plan for the people of this province; Bill 57 is not that. It will not get our support. We can do so much better, and we actually have a responsibility to do better.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? I've got four people standing up. Door number one, please.

Interjection: Madeleine, that's you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak today on Bill 57. Yes, the previous speaker is right: It's of concern to everyone. Are we going to have enough money in our retirement, especially those of us who don't have a pension plan?

My family still thinks that we have here as MPPs a very wealthy pension plan. I have to repeat regularly that no, we don't. Of course, it was a bad decision that was taken by the previous government, and now the MPPs don't have pension plans. There was some discussion in the past to reinstate the MPP pension plan, but there is never a good time, especially when only one third of Ontarians have a pension plan.

This PRPP is the next best thing, since the federal government doesn't want to help us in this endeavour by opening their pension plan so that Ontarians could contribute more than what we're entitled to contribute right now. So this is the best thing. There is a lot of support out there. I hope that this bill will go sooner than later to committee. It's at committee that we can improve it.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: The pooled registered pension plan is a good idea. It was the idea of our member from—

Mr. John Yakabuski: York-Simcoe.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: York-Simcoe—I knew that—and we supported it last year and we support it now. It's pleasing to see the government recognize a good idea when it is presented, and it is even more pleasing to see them adopt the idea. What would be most pleasing of all is if they would throw out the bad idea, which is their pension plan, which won't work. That one will cost 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion of money charged to employers and employees, so it's a very expensive payroll tax that will hurt Ontario, will hurt employees and will hurt employers.

But getting back to the positive news that they're doing a good thing—

Interjections.

Mr. Jack MacLaren:—and I wish they'd give me a moment to flatter them further—the pooled pension plan gives flexibility to the employers and employees. They can join or not; contribute or not. It will recognize and acknowledge that they may have other savings in other forms, like tax-free savings accounts, retirement plans of their own etc. These versatilities and flexibilities are absolutely necessary to make the plan work. It's unfortunate that if they go ahead with both, they will cancel the good with the bad, which is their idea.

We endorse this plan. It should go alone. It would do something good for Ontario. We thank the government for seeing something good, recognizing something good, and finally doing something good.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased and honoured to be able to stand up in this House and to talk about a bill such as this. I thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo for the insight that she brought to this bill.

New Democrats won't be supporting this bill. It makes me even more reaffirmed with my decision when I hear the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills saying that he will be supporting this bill, because we know that pensions should be universal. People should have to have a defined contribution plan where everybody has an opportunity to retire in dignity, to make sure—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I think you mean "benefit."

Hon. Liz Sandals: You mean "benefit."

Miss Monique Taylor: Defined benefit; thank you. There are so many pension plans floating around this place these days that it's kind of confusing to try to keep up and on track.

The same day that the government, the Liberals, tabled this bill, they tabled Bill 56, which is a plan that they're talking about that might possibly be in place by 2020, I think the numbers are. This government may not even be in power by that time. We will have a provincial election. We'll have a federal election. Quite frankly, we could have enhanced CPP after this federal election with a Thomas Mulcair government because we know that New Democrats believe and will push forward to make sure that all people in this country have a decent pension.

Like I said, again, there are so many talks about pension plans and what's good for everybody. But what

this does, really, is benefit banks and insurance companies. People are struggling enough. We have a major boom of seniors that's going to be happening in the near future and absolutely no plan in place so make sure that folks can have the funds that they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy to have the chance to stand this afternoon and speak to Bill 57 in response to some of the debate and discussion that has already occurred. I guess I'll begin with the comments that we just heard a second ago from the member from Hamilton Mountain. I think it's fortunate, if I can speak for a second on behalf of the federal NDP, that we're not in the middle of a federal campaign, because those two minutes would have to be declared as a campaign expense, I fear, for Mr. Mulcair, if we were in the middle of a campaign.

What's most important to recognize, of course, in listening to the original comments from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, is that—and I understand why she might, for her own purposes, want to make this particular bill, Bill 57, look like it stands in isolation from the rest of the plan that Premier Wynne, our finance minister and our Associate Minister of Finance are developing and proceeding with as it relates to ensuring that we do truly have an enhanced retirement security system in place for years to come.

She would well know, of course, as her party's finance critic, that this is not a piece of legislation that stands in isolation from the rest of our plan. It's a plan that includes, of course, the ORPP. It's interesting for me to listen to that particular member as she talks about the need to have some sort of universally applied solution to help seniors in years to come. What's interesting to me from that perspective is that, of course, that was in the budget that the finance minister introduced last May—I think it was May 1—that that party clearly signalled they would not support, which led, of course, to the election campaign in which we talked very proudly of our plans to bring forward an ORPP. The people of Ontario endorsed that plan wholeheartedly; we came back and we passed that budget.

It's interesting to me that the third party, including the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, chose at that point in time, perhaps for opportunistic reasons, to not support our plan to support retirement security for the people of Ontario in years to come. That's why it's a little bit difficult to hear those comments in this debate from her today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo has two minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the members from Hamilton Mountain and Carleton–Mississippi Mills, the Attorney General and the Minister of Transportation for providing some important insights.

The Minister of Transportation, of course, would know—we both came here via by-elections. We both came here because of Bill 115, in some respects, because

some people ran out of this building as fast as they could when Bill 115 was brought into place. That was, of course—you'll remember, Mr. Speaker—the piece of legislation which squashed collective bargaining rights in the province of Ontario in order to make this government look like it was fiscally responsible so that they could win Kitchener–Waterloo. So just a little bit of history here for the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: What has that got to do with Bill 57?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would also like to remind the minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe the member listened intently to you when you were up. Do the same courtesy for her, would you, Minister of Transportation? Thank you so much for your co-operation.

Continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He will also remember, of course, that that budget, which was, of course, an austerity budget, had 6% cuts in every ministry except for health care, education, justice, and community and social services. But of course, they figured out how to do backdoor cuts in those ministries, which is why we have nurses being laid off, and front-line workers in education, and why 38 boards are going to see a reduction in their special education services. So do not preach in this House about that budget, because that budget was actually worth going to an election for. It was worth fighting for a better province.

I'm telling you, you know what else is worth fighting for? A good, strong pension plan, which we brought to this House in 2010. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, did that. Liberals voted against it. What you have on the floor in this province is not a good plan; I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to stand today in the House to speak a little further on the second reading of Bill 57. I will be sharing my time with the members from Durham, Davenport and Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

As outlined last week by my colleague the Honorable Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance, many workers in our province, as you may know, Speaker, are not saving enough. As well, we have learned through our talks in this House that Canada's retirement income system is made up of three pillars.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Transportation and the member from Etobicoke Centre are having a lovely conversation. Maybe you want to take it outside. Your own member is talking and you're not even listening. Thank you so much.

Continue.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: As I was saying, we have, basically, a retirement income system that is made up of three pillars. Pillar number one includes publicly funded supplements for seniors through vehicles such as Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and those are based on residency and income eligibility.

Pillar number two, the Canada Pension Plan, is a mandatory pension program for the employed and the self-employed. And then we have pillar number three which includes workplace pension plans and other assisted retirement savings—there is a whole array of them.

To address the undersaving challenge in the province of Ontario, there is no one solution. We have to take a multifaceted approach, with solutions and innovations from all three of these pillars. That is why our plan for enhancing the retirement income system in our province includes a variety of tools. Establishing pooled registered pension plans is yet another way in which we are addressing the undersavings challenge.

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Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak a little bit on just what pooled registered pension plans are, just for clarity. Many employers, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, have found that workplace pension plans, especially defined benefit plans, are costly and difficult to administer. PRPPs are a new type of voluntary tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicles. As a new low-cost retirement savings vehicle that is professionally managed and portable, I would say, from one workplace to another, they are intended to make it easier for employees and self-employed persons to save for retirement. PRPPs are a vehicle for the self-employed to be able to invest in their retirement at a low cost.

Simply put, PRPPs are saving plans designed to provide retirement income for individuals who pay into them. People have their own individual accounts, and employers are also able to make contributions into these accounts. The contributions are locked in, and benefits at retirement are based on accumulated contributions and investment returns. There is also a tax advantage for individuals because they would not pay income tax on their PRPP contributions and on their investment returns until they withdraw their funds.

I also want to address very quickly: Last week, my colleagues in the House were asking how Ontarians will benefit from the PRPPs. First of all, they would help businesses because they would be easy to offer, they would be voluntary and they would be tax-assisted. PRPPs would also provide advantages to individuals because they would be low-cost, they would be tax-assisted, they would be portable and they would be locked in. The federal government has already implemented PRPPs for sectors under federal jurisdiction, and the legislation applies also to persons who are employed or self-employed in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. But we need to pass the legislation here in Ontario to make sure that Ontarians can benefit from it.

If passed, this bill would provide a legal framework for the establishment and administration of PRPPs in Ontario. Since we want to make PRPPs as similar as possible across the county, our proposed legislation adopts many of the key features of the federal PRPP legislative work. For any employers who choose to offer their employees PRPPs, the employer would be responsible

for selecting and entering into a contract with a third-party PRPP administrator, such as a bank or an insurance company. That bank or insurance company's administrator would then be responsible for managing the investments, and the employee of that company would be automatically enrolled in the PRPP offered by his or her employer. But employees can choose to opt out. They have up to 60 days to opt out, and I want to make that clear for the people that are watching from home: that they can opt out. There is an option to opt out.

Employees would make their contribution through automatic paycheque deductions, and the employer would be required to deduct and remit their employees' contributions to the administrator. So it's quite clearly set. It is, again, one of many options that this government is looking at to make sure that we can address the gap that we have in undersaving with the residents of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm assuming you were sharing your time. The member from York South–Weston, you were sharing your time with the member from Durham?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Yes.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: That's what she said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, thank you.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I said Durham, Davenport and Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks to the Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I was trying to help you out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I appreciate your help.

The member for Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to see that our government is taking the initiative to expand Ontarians' options when it comes to investing in their finances, especially when it comes to saving and investing in their retirement. We know that in this province, there are concerns with not saving enough for our later years. Furthering our options provides Ontarians with opportunities for greater income security.

The federal legislation that has allowed the provinces to permit pooled retirement pension plans is welcome, though it's not necessarily the ideal way of investing for retirement. Expanding CPP would, of course, be the ideal option, contributing to a Canadian investment plan that furthers investment in the country. Of course, our government is taking the much-needed initiative to fill the gap with the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, one that will expand Ontarians' investments in their own province.

The PRPP in Ontario will also be administered by third-party financial institutions, meaning that it will be the investing and purchasing power of banks, rather than investment for the public good. So while the federal government is making at least a partial effort, there is still

very much that needs to be done and methods that would be much more ideal for Ontarians.

It is important to note, and I think vital to this process, that the PRPP is not considered a comparable income plan to the ORPP, and thus would not classify as an exemption from the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Still, PRPP stands as a valid option beyond CPP and ORPP for individuals and employers to set up systems within their own capacities for the benefits of retirement plans. They are also exempt for employers from the taxation of an RRSP, the viability of which, I imagine, lies in the benefit that small employers will see from the plans, and that will hopefully be made clear as the years go by.

Other provinces have also been implementing this federal plan with slight modifications. There are those within Quebec that go beyond the federal legislation. I hope that further examination of this legislation will ensure that the implementation of this plan will be tailored to the specific needs of our province and Ontarians. My hope is that the implementation of the PRPP and the expression of opting into a PRPP as an option will encourage Ontarians to take a harder and more detail-oriented look at their finances, their savings and how they are planning financially for their retirement.

Residents of Durham have expressed to me that as they age, they are wishing that they had saved more in their youth for their retirement, as well as for the well-being of their families.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I heard that in Bowmanville; that's right.

Mr. Granville Anderson: That's right.

I know that our government will be expanding efforts to encourage more deliberate financial planning skills for Ontarians in their younger years and that any help we can provide them with investing will be appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I will quote some findings from the Toronto Star:

"In 2012, Canadian defined benefit plans paid out \$72 billion to 3.5 million pensioners.

"Most of this money is spent where they live.

"In Ontario, 7% of all income in our towns and cities, or \$27 billion, is derived from defined benefit pensions.

"That \$27 billion generated \$3 billion in federal and provincial income tax, \$2 billion in sales taxes and \$1 billion in property tax on an annual basis.

"Seniors with defined benefit plans are confident consumers because the predictable income stream allows them to better plan their affairs."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Today I rise to speak on this necessary bill, Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014. I'd like to thank the member from York South–Weston for her comments on this bill, as well as the member from Durham and everyone who has had the opportunity to speak and contribute to the discussion here this afternoon.

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Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act of 2014, is a necessary one. The Minister of Finance introduced this legislation on December 8, 2014, and I commend him and the Associate Minister of Finance for their work to address the savings problems that so many of my constituents face in Davenport.

We all need to make sure that we save for our retirement. Our province is committed to implementing bold steps to enhance Ontarians' access to retirement income security. This is seen with Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. Encouraging investment in voluntary retirement savings tools such as pooled registered pension plans are part of the strategy.

The 2014 budget and fall economic statement demonstrated the government's intention to move forward with a PRPP framework that would be consistent with the model introduced by the federal government and also adopted by various other provinces. What this bill does is provide employees and self-employed individuals with an additional savings vehicle that is low-cost, professionally managed and portable from one workplace to another.

In addition, these individuals have more favourable tax treatments than group registered retirement savings plans. As a point of clarification, a voluntary retirement savings vehicle is not a comparable workplace pension plan in the new ORPP. In this sense, individuals enrolled in a PRPP are not exempt from participation in the new ORPP.

After two years of federal-provincial collaboration in the development of PRPPs, our federal partners were the first to introduce a legislative framework for PRPPs in December 2012. The framework applies to employees in federally regulated sectors such as banking, telecommunications and interprovincial transportation.

Legislation must now be passed in each province before PRPPs can be made available to individuals in provincially regulated sectors. The 2014 budget and fall economic statement demonstrated the government's intention to move forward with the PRPP framework. To date, five provinces have passed legislation to implement PRPPs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Which five provinces?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Let me tell you which five.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to hear the list.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Quebec.

Applause.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: That's right. Ontario's PRPP framework follows suit with these provincial partners. In January of 2014, consultations were held seeking feedback on how PRPPs should be implemented in Ontario. The proposed act would apply in respect of individuals employed in provincial employment, the self-employed in Ontario as well as individuals employed in federally regulated industries whose employers do not offer PRPPs.

The proposed act incorporates many of the features of the federal model. There is voluntary participation and

contributions by employers. Where an employer elects to offer a PRPP, enrolment of employees would be automatic, subject to the ability to opt out within 60 days, and funds in members' accounts could be pooled for the purposes of investing plan assets, and members could make investment choices from among the options offered by administrators.

Last time I spoke in this House to discuss Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, I talked about the effect of retirement savings on small businesses. Small businesses are a crucial part of our province's economic growth and well-being. In my wonderful riding of Davenport, we have many great small businesses which make our community that much more vibrant. Davenport has so many interesting and transforming neighbourhoods which are really tied together by dynamic, small and local businesses. Anyone can see this with a stroll through areas such as Corso Italia, Bloordale, West Queen West, the Junction Triangle and Little Portugal. Walking along many of these neighbourhoods, it is easy to see how integrated and essential these small businesses are to our community. Many of them are owned and run by our local residents, and they are people who dedicated their lives and are truly invested in their local community.

It is often quite difficult to start your own business. They are absolutely vital for our economy, and we must do what we can to support these individuals and organizations. This bill does that. PRPPs are intended to be particularly beneficial for small and medium-size businesses that may not have the capacity to offer traditional pension plans.

It is my pleasure to speak today on Bill 57, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House believe in national initiatives, whether it's those initiatives that we're still waiting for from the federal government, like a national housing policy, a national transit policy or a national infrastructure policy. But failed as the concept of pooled pension plans is, which the Conservatives promote as the best vehicle for retirement planning, we on this side of the House do realize there was federal legislation approved for PRPPs and a number of provinces have implemented legislation. Ontario will join those provinces in creating the ability for Ontarians and Canadians to be able to participate in PRPPs. As my colleague from Davenport just mentioned, especially for small businesspeople and those who are self-employed, this might very well be a very good vehicle for planning for their retirement.

Mr. Speaker, we know that only about 23% or 24% of people in Canada contribute to their RRSPs on an annual basis. That's far less than should. We also know there is well in excess of \$200 billion of unused contribution

room. Clearly, Canadians and Ontarians aren't saving enough for their retirement. That only bodes ill for governments in the future, as many Canadians will have to turn to the public purse to assist them and support them in retirement. Whatever we on this side of the House can do to help advance retirement savings, we will do.

Of course, the ORPP, which is a separate piece of legislation, is a far superior vehicle than this for doing that, because it will allow many of those who would, in fact, never contribute to a pension plan, and whose employers may never contribute to a pension plan, to be able to save for retirement and retire in dignity.

What we have before us this afternoon is the pooled pension plans act, and that will allow many Ontarians to contribute to their retirement savings and have a pension that will be portable as they go from employer to employer or perhaps start their own business. That is a great benefit of this particular piece of legislation. So, failed as the concept is, it is an important piece of the puzzle for our government to participate in this national initiative. Of course, having improved CPP and an ORPP is really the best solution for Ontarians' retirement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise. I'm somewhat surprised by some of the comments made over there. I know that they say they would like the feds to take off on this, but if they would think back to what was actually said at the federal government, they said they were interested in it, but now is not the time.

Businesses are in trouble. You can see from the stats in this province that the number of people on minimum wage is up drastically; 30%, I think. That's not a sign of a strong economy. We're seeing a manufacturing industry that has been decimated in this province well before the downturn in 2008. I look at my own riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—actually Glengarry. We lost about 3,300 jobs before 2008, companies leaving when they—the evidence of what this government is really doing.

I'm glad to hear that the member over there was talking about hurrying up and getting a car from GM in Oshawa. They may not have an option in the not-too-distant future, because they're talking about leaving too. Of the seven or eight car companies that have opened factories on this continent in the last dozen years, not one was opened in Ontario. That speaks to this government's planning.

You can imagine the confidence people would have in the ORPP, putting money into a plan that has direct access by this government. What will be there in the future, let alone all the other problems? This government was talking about accessing it on infrastructure. Will that be there?

1640

I remember, just last week, I think CUPE was talking about how proud they were of their pension plan, a defined contribution plan that was generating 9%. I asked them, "Well, how would you feel once this legislation is

passed and you must move over to the ORPP?" And they said, "Oh, no, we won't. We're going to get some amendments to allow that not to happen." I said, "Good luck with that." But they were getting 9%, and I just wonder if that's what we're expecting with this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yesterday, I had the opportunity to attend the Workers' Action Centre. They're doing their review of the Labour Relations Act and their review of the Employment Standards Act. What they told me there, at the table I was participating in, is what workers really need are good jobs. They need good jobs, not temporary contract jobs through temporary agencies; not part-time jobs; not contract jobs; not jobs without pensions or without benefits. How are they going to be able to even contribute to a PRPP when they're making part-time wages or they're making minimum wage or just above minimum wage?

Some of the experts have also weighed in on the PRPP recently, and what they say about them is that these plans represent only a mild improvement over the existing Registered Retirement Savings Plan that anybody can do personally on any day of the week. And, in fact, you could have that money deducted personally from your paycheque, deposited into your bank account and self-direct your own RRSP without paying huge management fees to the banks and to the insurance companies—to do so on your own behalf.

In fact, the experts say that, lastly, it seems almost too obvious to state that a pension plan should actually pay a pension at the end of the day—at the very least be able to pay out a pension—but PRPPs will not be able to do so, because the federal tax rules prohibit any pension plan from paying a pension unless it's a defined benefit, and allowing PRPPs to pay a pension could improve retirement income security if that was actually part of the plan.

So, Speaker, I look forward to having a longer opportunity to speak some more on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I was delighted to be here this afternoon to listen to the very articulate remarks from my colleagues the members from York South–Weston, Durham, Davenport and Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

I just want to comment particularly on the new members from Durham, Davenport and Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Obviously, they were on the hustings last June. I know these people well. They were in their communities, they were in the coffee shops, and they heard about pensions and the need to have a number of approaches for retirement here in Ontario, whether it's Bill 57 or the Ontario pension plan. Mr. Speaker, I remember you spoke on numerous occasions very passionately about the need for pensions in the province of Ontario, and we on this side see this as a very important initiative—both bills.

I know just recently I was at the East City Coffee Shop on Hunter Street East in Peterborough—a great

restaurant owned by the Sina family, hard-working people—and I was having my Western sandwich there and a coffee; it's still \$6. There were a number of people who were there that day and we were engaging in a discussion about pensions. There was a consensus of the people there—probably five or six people, representing all aspects of life in Peterborough—and they were saying that they applaud this government and support this government as we move forward to provide adequate pensions in the province of Ontario.

This is very, very important that we move forward. We'd like the government of Canada to be a partner, but they haven't come to the table as of yet.

So I want to thank my four colleagues who got their views on the record today—three new members representing their constituents with great vigour and passion—from York South–Weston, Durham, Davenport, Etobicoke–Lakeshore. They know how important pensions are.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to comment on the address by the multitude of members from the other side. They really have taken on the tag-team approach to this debating process here in the Legislature. I commend them on being able to marshal their folks together and get four in at the price of one, but I would have thought they'd want to spend a little more time speaking on the bill. I'm hoping to get a 20-minute slot at some point, but I just haven't been able to make the grade at this point. But I do have a couple of minutes to speak on this.

It's interesting that the Liberals brought forward this pooled retirement pension plan right after their Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, Bill 56, which passed second reading not that long ago. I don't think they're really sure what they want for Ontarians, and it makes me wonder just how committed they are to their own piece of legislation.

The pooled retirement pension plan has never been their idea. It has been proposed by others. In fact, our member Julia Munro brought that out in a bill before.

I'm just wondering what the true motive, or what the plan for the Liberals is with this Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Is it just another one of these red herrings that they're throwing out there? Are they really committed to it themselves?

We all know it's going to be bad for the Ontario economy. That goes without saying. There's not a single credible institution that has said this is a good idea for the Ontario economy. It's wrong. It's not going to work.

Now, right on the heels of it, they're coming out with this pooled plan, which we support. We're going to be supporting Bill 57. As you know, we did not vote in favour of Bill 56 at second reading. We'll be supporting Bill 57, because it's the right direction to go so that there are savings to be accrued by having the pooling of savings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore has two minutes.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: To the member from Renfrew: I think it's called an onslaught, actually, what we've been doing this afternoon.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, pensions might be very important to those of us in this chamber—most of us are closer to needing them than many others. My daughter, Ariana, is here today. I worry about her and her pension 60 years from now and making sure that by then Ontarians have the ability to have a secure retirement.

As I said in my remarks earlier, pooled pension plans are part of a national construct. They are not, in my view, the ideal way to promote retirement savings, but they are a national construct, and we will participate in that.

The real solution, though, is an enhanced CPP. I'm hopeful that perhaps by next year that will be a conversation we can then have, but failing that, it will have to be the ORPP.

On this side of the House, we're very clear on what we want: We want Ontarians to have good retirement savings, we want Ontarians to have security in their retirement, and we want to provide them with the best possible vehicles to do that, for those in this chamber and for future generations, Mr. Speaker. That's what this is about. That's what everything that we do in this chamber is really about: future generations.

I look forward to the ongoing debate on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased and proud to be able to stand to talk about Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act of 2014. It sounds an awful lot like the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act of 2013, the former Bill 50, which was introduced by our member from York-Simcoe.

The Ontario PC caucus has been at the forefront of advocating for PRPPs, and I'm pleased that the government has realized that this is, indeed, the right way to go and that people need options for their retirement savings.

Actually, Speaker, the member from York-Simcoe's bill did pass second reading. It was referred to committee after second reading but died on the order paper.

PRPPs are a type of pension plan that is similar to a defined contribution plan and are completely voluntary. Employer contributions are not mandatory and therefore PRPPs are supported by the business owners as well.

1650

Ontarians have a right to choose how they save for retirement. That is why we are, on this side of the House, so opposed to the ORPP, the Ontario registered pension program being presented by the government. But we are indeed in favour of the PRPP, the pooled registered pension plan. This is offered to anyone who is working in Ontario, including the self-employed.

PRPPs are portable between jobs and employers. That means that when you leave a job and move to another one, you can take your PRPP with you. It's yours. When you die, it becomes part of your estate, unlike an ORPP, where you pay into it, if it's passed, and you don't get to reap the benefits—your family doesn't—when you die.

The PRPP is something that belongs as part of your estate.

The fact that they're portable makes them easier to continue contributing to when you do move to a new job. A portable pension plan is a convenient pension plan. Again, this is considerably and diametrically opposed to an ORPP, the Ontario registered pension plan, which forces employees and employers into contributing 1.9% of their salary each.

When we were on the pre-budget consultation tour only this past January, I met up with a guy in southwestern Ontario who has 15 employees. He said to me, "Tell me a little bit about that plan." And I explained it to him. He said, "Yes, yes, yes. I understand. That's everything I feared it was." He told me, "Here's what I'm going to do. I've got 15 employees. I have to now pay 1.9% into a mandated pension plan for them and they're going to have to pay 1.9% of their salary. They're not going to want to take a haircut on their paycheque. They're going to come to me with their hand out looking for more money to make them equal again, and I've got to take a haircut on an additional 1.9%. So I'm going to fire one of my 15 employees, use that money to pay my share of the ORPP and to give them a raise to make up for the money that the government is taking." This is an anecdotal story. This is a true story of what happened. That's what's going to happen across Ontario.

That's why we prefer the PRPP, which is voluntary—Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have all passed PRPP legislation. Nova Scotia introduced legislation in October 2014. They're going to continue their conversation on it.

That anecdotal story from southwestern Ontario is exactly what the Ministry of Finance said would happen in their confidential advice to cabinet. They told Premier Wynne, at that time newly elected, "This pension tax that you bring in will cost you 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion you take out of the economy." It looks to be a \$6-billion program. Their own ministry has forecasted that we're going to lose 54,000 jobs in Ontario, much like the story of the one guy in southwestern Ontario with his 15 employees. He's going to have to let somebody go to pay for it. Companies just don't have any more money.

In 2012, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce submitted a letter to the former finance minister—then-minister, actually—Dwight Duncan, calling on the government to introduce legislation to implement PRPPs. The business community wanted this in 2012. I think the Ontario chamber has 60,000 members. This is a quote from their letter: "We hope you believe, as we do, that PRPPs will help strengthen the retirement income system in Ontario." I think that's a fair sentence from them.

The Ontario chamber has come out, rather, on the other side on the ORPP. They have talked about the fact that they are not convinced that the ORPP is the best solution for the so-called retirement income challenge or the undersaving problem. The chamber and their members—well, here's the quote: "The chamber and our members have been worried about the potential negative

impacts of the ORPP on the business climate.” Another quote—this is from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce: “We are convinced that the ORPP should not go ahead. We really want to see the government come out with an economic impact analysis of how the ORPP will impact Ontario’s economy.”

So here you’ve got them saying, “We really like the PRPP. Let’s get going with it; we hope that you’ll put this in because it will strengthen the economy.” And here, on the ORPP, they’re saying, “We’re going to lose jobs, it’s going to affect our business climate and we don’t want you to go ahead with it.”

In the chamber’s business confidence index, they’re very concerned that the government is discussing the Ontario Registered Pension Plan at a time when business confidence is already amongst its lowest in history—very concerned.

They have just published a report of their business confidence, and if we look here, they asked of their members, “How confident are you in the Ontario economy right now?” Two years ago, the result was that 44% were confident in the economy. Last year it was up to 48%. But this year it tumbled to 29%. That’s a very big concern.

Here’s another one: “How confident are you in your own organization’s economic outlook right now?” Again, two years ago, 72% were confident in the economic outlook. Last year, it rose to 74%. Bravo. However, this year, it has tumbled to 58%. That’s almost 20 points. While the Ontario chamber is in favour of PRPP, they are vehemently opposed to the ORPP.

Now we’ve got the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and a similar style you’re going to hear, Speaker. In 2012, the CFIB submitted a letter to then-finance minister Dwight Duncan urging him “to move quickly to implement pooled registered pension plans in our province. We further ask that you would”—they wanted to address the problems with the current pension tools by promoting lower fees, shifting admin burdens etc. So here we are, again, with the CFIB asking for urgent implementation of the PRPP, but when it comes to the ORPP, like the chamber, it’s a different story.

The CFIB asked their members, on the implementation of the ORPP, “Do you support the implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan?” Eighty-six per cent of their members were against it. They went on and said, “If implemented, what impact would paying additional ORPP premiums have on your business?” Sixty-nine per cent of the business community said they would freeze or cut salaries; 53% said they would reduce the number of employees; and 52% said they would reduce investments in their business. Thirteen per cent, by the way, said they were going to close down their businesses. They’ve had enough, whether it’s skyrocketing hydro rates, the highest payroll taxes in Canada, now the highest aviation fuel tax in Canada—all these other reasons added together. Like the chamber of commerce said, this is just not the time, when business confidence is at its lowest.

1700

Again, the CFIB said, about the PRPP, “We want you to move quickly to implement it.” They like that. On the ORPP, 86% are against it. You’ve got people who will reduce their number of employees and close their businesses. The analysis they did says “that this mandatory pension plan would cost Ontario 160,000 person-years of employment. As well, it would increase the province’s unemployment rate by 0.5%.” This is the analysis that the CFIB did.

They also talk about the fact that, “If implemented, the ORPP will severely undermine the ability of Ontario’s job creators to grow their businesses and continue offering” new businesses in Ontario.

“The ORPP targets ... small business owners and their employees.” The PRPP, being voluntary, helps small businesses. In fact, it helps individual business owners—self-employed people. “Forcing additional pension contributions reduces income available to cover essential goods and services for Ontario families.”

We all know what the CFIB is telling us. It’s going to take 40 years for employees to receive full benefits. Quite frankly, they’ve surmised that Ontarians don’t trust an entity at arm’s length from this government to manage their retirement savings. They think about things like the gas plant scandal or MaRS or the Sudbury scandal. They think about that when they think about this government managing their retirement savings.

While they’re fully in favour of the PRPP, they are against the ORPP—another organization that is like that.

Speaker, in January and February of last year, the Ontario chamber, which we spoke about, and the Certified General Accountants of Ontario partnered to consult employers on pension reform. Nobody here will disagree that there is a requirement to reform our pension needs in Ontario. Everybody wants to see everyone retire with dignity. But they found that employers are firmly in favour of PRPPs—this is the Certified General Accountants of Ontario—and are much less supportive of the ORPP.

Here’s what the president and CEO of Sun Life said: “I don’t think we need to or should mandate retirement savings.” That’s why they’re in favour of the PRPP. That’s why our member from York–Simcoe brought this bill, Bill 50, to the Legislature, and that’s why we passed it at second reading.

The Association of Canadian Pension Management has championed the concept of PRPPs. The “ACPM believes that this kind of innovative new arrangement is key to creating the kind of retirement security that working Canadians deserve.” I agree with the ACPM as well.

These are the kinds of things we have that contrast the fully acceptable PRPP over the job-killing pension tax of the ORPP.

I know that there are members in the government who have been referring to what we call the David Dodge report. It’s Macroeconomic Aspects of Retirement Savings; it’s just easier to call it the David Dodge report. Now it’s really interesting to note that Dodge has seven

recommendations, none of which include a provincial pension plan, the ORPP, or the pension tax.

In fact, here are a couple of David Dodge's conclusions: "To the extent possible, general social welfare is probably better served by leaving the 'savings decision' up to individual households." That's the PRPP; that's the choice. That's not a mandatory ORPP, but a voluntary PRPP. He also said that "increased CPP contributions by employers would likely have a small downward impact on corporate saving. They would also encourage investment in labour-saving technology...." We know what labour-saving technology means, Speaker; it's job losses.

So you've got the David Dodge report telling you you're going to lose jobs when you put in a program such as increased contributions by employers. You've got the Ministry of Finance's own documents, which we did unearth through the gas plants scandal hearings—they were some of the documents that we got and we were able to quote from them because they were released publicly—that told us that for every \$2 billion you take out of the business world, you lose 18,000 jobs. That's pretty much what the David Dodge report says, but their own Ministry of Finance put some numbers to it that kind of put some meat on the bone.

Dr. Ian Lee is a Carleton University professor from the Sprott School of Business. It was interesting: He came to our pre-budget consultations in Ottawa when all three parties travelled there. He spoke to us at length, and he talked about—it's a little technical—the bottom quintiles that are not going to benefit from the proposed pension. So who is he talking about? He is talking about people who can least afford to lose 1.9% of their paycheque to put into this pension program. First of all, they're the least able to afford to do it, but at the end, 40 years from now when it's time to cash in, and they're retired and they look to get that back, the GIS will be clawed back 50%. For other people who are not in the bottom quintile, as he calls it, you don't have a GIS, you don't have a guaranteed income supplement, so you're not going to get anything clawed back. But the lowest earners are going to be putting this money in, but they get their GIS clawed back because they "won't need it." So they're the ones who can least afford it, and they're the ones who are going to be the most hurt by the ORPP.

The PRPP is the preferred option. I can't imagine why we need both when you've got one, the ORPP, that's going to mandate that you must have this pension. Then why are you going to have an optional one?

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this for the last 20 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This Legislature is a very special place. It's where we come as elected officials to create legislation—to pass legislation, to debate legislation—to make a difference in people's lives. When we're talking about a difference in people's lives when it comes to legislation, we're talking about the retirement bill today. Speaker, we don't think this PRPP is going to help

the average person collect a pension at the end of the day. We are going to oppose this bill because it isn't the right way to go when you're talking about retirement security.

Speaker, when you look at Google, if you google defined benefit versus defined contribution, defined benefit is by far the way for income security when you talk about retirement planning.

1710

There are benefits to a defined benefit plan, Speaker. Here are some of the benefits: inflation protection, early retirement benefits, survivor benefits and disability benefits. Opposite that is defined contribution: At retirement, individuals may be able to buy a lifetime annuity that includes some additional benefits such as inflation protection, but these extras tend to be expensive, which reduces the amount they will have available to provide an income stream.

Speaker, people are not going to buy those benefits if they're on a defined contribution plan. But under a defined benefit plan, it's already covered. So this is not the plan that people actually need to survive when it comes to guaranteed retirement payments when they're ready to retire. This is not the right plan. I'm glad to speak to this debate and let the government know that this is not the way to go.

I talked to someone in my riding, Speaker, and they said that this Liberal government doesn't know what they're doing when it comes to pension plans. It's a mishmash, and it's a mess.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Wherever you say, Mr. Speaker, that's where I'm from.

Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to join the conversation and debate on this subject. I can tell you that it's something we have discussed variables of over the years. I can tell you that I see five provinces already in that format, and they have produced legislation; they have proceeded with that. Those, of course, are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Quebec. It's something that the pooled resources will have a small impact, cost-wise, on employers as well as the contributors. That has been a concern of the chambers of commerce.

As a small business person who commenced a business in his teen years—obviously, he's been in business longer than 50 years—and a member of the chamber of commerce for over 50 years, I, as an employer, have to tell you that it's not a cost that you, as a chamber of commerce, should be concerned about, and I tell my colleagues that; it's the investment in the employee. That employee is your lifeblood. If you don't have great people—and we are fortunate enough to have great people—you won't succeed. So those funds are simply part of the cost of doing business. You can simply find other efficiencies or other ways to circumvent that and make it bearable for those good people who have devoted their lives to working for you, when it comes to their retirement time.

It's something that you can look at objectively and say, "If it's going to cost me one penny, I won't support it." You have to be a realist. You have to be an independent business person with a heart. It's very important that you do that for your employees, because without that, they will not produce for you, and you will not continue to be successful. I think it's a great idea to proceed, and the sooner the better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I always look forward to listening to my colleague from Nipissing, because he always brings so much to the table. During the debate, I was reading the latest Fedeli Focus on Finance. It's too bad that some of the members opposite wouldn't read that, because there's a lot of good data in it.

We received some of the data that talked about the ORPP that they are putting forth as well. We're looking at losing 54,000 jobs—their numbers. I mean, it goes to show you that the plan they are moving ahead—the other bill; the first one—is actually looking at job losses in the bottom quintile, people not receiving the benefits they paid for.

We've always been supporting the ORPP. Julia Munro, our member here, brought it forth two years ago. Other provinces have followed suit. It's a good plan that employers can opt into.

I heard the comment from the member from—is it Oshawa-Ajax? He talked about, "Listen to what the other provinces are doing." I think it would be nice if they'd listen to what the other provinces are doing with the first plan, because that's not something they're moving ahead on. They realize how fragile the economy is and just what it will mean for many people who will end up losing their jobs. I guess this government thinks it's a success; it will put more people on the minimum wage. They're so very proud of converting a good-paying manufacturing job into a minimum wage job, but that's not how we see it. We think we have to go through and try to look at policies in a format that will actually raise our quality of life and standard of living back to where we grew up a decade or a couple of decades ago and it was moving towards. Anyway, we will be supporting this bill and look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Nipissing feels very strongly about this issue. During question period this morning, he totally used up all of his energy because he was so passionate about addressing the fact that of course, yesterday, the minister—we were both at the Toronto board of trade. The minister thought we'd get out there and learn something, but in fact we just learned that this government is really good at inflating their own deficit targets so that they can look like they've met those targets.

Of course, we are dealing with the deficit, which grew from \$9.2 billion to \$10.5 billion, ballooning to \$10.9 billion this year. It's proof that this government does not

listen to the experts. We would like them to listen to the experts on PRPPs and, of course, the ORPP. That's why I referenced the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan and their most recent research study that shows that defined benefit pension plans actually meet the needs of local economies and inspire investment in the province, especially for those northern and rural communities. I think the member from Nipissing knows this.

Obviously, the real solution to the retirement crisis is one that benefits all of us, which Bill 57 does not do. While there's no shortage of good ideas that can help ensure that Canadians and Ontarians are financially secure in retirement, it would take commitment from both governments and employers. I think that's the fundamental difference: that we see the issue of creating and designing a strong pension plan as a shared responsibility. I think he understands that, at the very least, people who do invest in a PRPP should be guaranteed at least a portion of their working income when they retire. After all, they've earned it. With PRPPs there's no guarantee of that happening. So that's why we can't support this. But, of course, we're always willing to listen to the member from Nipissing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): How nice.

The member from Nipissing has two minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much. I hope you enjoy the next two minutes, then. I want to thank the members from London-Fanshawe, Ajax-Pickering, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and Kitchener-Waterloo for their commentary. The real solution, in my opinion, is having a job. When you think about 500,000 people in Ontario who woke up this morning without a job, I know everybody in this Legislature—we think about those people every day.

We particularly think about the 300,000 of them who used to work in manufacturing in Ontario, whether it's Heinz or Kellogg's or Caterpillar or Wrigley or General Mills. These are companies who were proud Canadian companies—Arclin in North Bay. All my life they were there, under the name Reichhold. All of these companies have left. They didn't go out of business; they just left Ontario. I think that is the underlying problem when we talk about our pension program; it all stems from having a job. When you've got the province with the highest cost of energy in all of North America, when you've got the highest pension payroll tax in Canada, when you've got, as of today, the highest aviation fuel tax in the country, these are not the incentives that the business community wants. These are not the incentives to create jobs. I've not ever found a new tax that has created a job. So the real solution is having a job. I know that we will all continue to work towards that goal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

1720

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's always a pleasure to rise and weigh in on some of these bills that have a lot of people opposed on one side and a lot of people in favour on another side.

I think I'll start off agreeing with the member from Nipissing that more importantly than talking about PRPPs, we really should be talking about jobs. We should be talking about jobs and the need for good jobs in our community. I can tell you, Speaker, that in my riding, with the loss of manufacturing jobs—thousands of them—many people have actually had to sell their houses to survive in retirement. They don't have the money to invest in a PRPP, let alone an RRSP, because they've gone through those RRSPs as well that they were able to invest in when they had a good job to augment the pension that they actually thought they were going to get out of these companies that they slaved for for 30 and 40 years. As you know, Speaker, coming from Hamilton, even those pensions aren't secure any longer.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Steelworkers.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Steelworkers across this province who thought they were going to have a \$1,600 or \$2,000 pension perhaps 10 years ago and who thought today they might have a \$3,000-a-month pension—those pensions are all at risk. I've seen, in my own community—Atlas Specialty Steels, which went out of business about 10 years ago—people who had a \$2,000 pension, only to lose a third of it five or six years down the road, and some of those health care benefits as well that went with it. Those people are struggling in our communities now.

As the previous New Democrat housing and community and social services critic, I can't help but be reminded every day, Speaker, of the countless emails and phone calls that I have received from across this province: seniors who face way too many obstacles day in and day out to allow them to have contributed to a pension plan, particularly those ones who are new seniors, not the ones who are 70 and 80 and perhaps had a small pension plan from wherever they happened to work in their life.

As the labour critic most recently, I've already been exposed to the need for pensions of Ontarians through those discussions with the people in my riding and with the labour force across Ontario that I've been able to meet with in a very short period of time. I received a very memorable phone call not too long ago about how the system is currently failing too many hard-working families in our province.

Paul from Kitchener–Waterloo, one of Ms. Fife's constituents, an ODSP recipient, injured at work, unable to work, let alone contribute to a pension plan, is living on seven credit cards and juggling one each month to be able to actually pay off the other ones. When he learned that this government was actually cutting the contributions to ODSP for those people who were actually able to go to work, which would have helped this fellow actually find maybe some training and some work, he just kind of threw up his hands and said, "What am I going to do? There isn't anything that I can do. I can't live on this." How are people like this gentleman actually going to be able to contribute to a pension plan?

Recently in my riding, I got a call from a senior. Her name is Bianca. She lives in Thorold, in part of my

riding. She got a gas bill worth \$1,000 for a two-month period. She lives in a very modest house in Thorold—probably a 75-year-old, two-storey, 1,200-square-foot house—and she got a \$1,000 bill. She is a senior. How is she going to pay \$1,000? She worked at the St. Lawrence Seaway for a long period of time and she has a very small pension. I don't know what kind of job she did there, but I don't think that she made a whole lot of money in her time. So it's vital that the government is addressing the concerns of seniors with respect to their home heating costs.

But we're here today talking about PRPPs. As such, I can't talk about the PRPP or the ORPP without looking at it from this lens and seeing how it isn't going to serve the interests of Ontarians, especially those left on the margins, those people being paid minimum wage, which is a large percentage of this workforce, and those who need it the most.

As we know, there are too many Ontarians without sufficient workplace pensions struggling to make ends meet once they retire. Pension plans, defined benefit plans—I think the member from Kitchener–Waterloo said only about 30% of the population actually has that kind of pension plan—allow seniors to be financially prepared. They allow them to continue to contribute to the economy.

Seniors on a defined pension plan can actually go out and buy a house, because they know that every month they're going to have \$3,000 or \$2,000. Across this province, only if you own a house in Toronto or Mississauga, in areas where housing prices rise dramatically, can you actually sell your house and use that as your pension plan. And that happens in Niagara and it happens in Hamilton as well. Lots of people actually are moving from Toronto and Mississauga, selling their houses, getting a million bucks, and they're actually moving to Niagara, they're moving to Hamilton, they're moving to some rural communities because they didn't have a defined benefit pension plan and so now they will use that \$700,000 they have left over from the sale of their house to actually be their retirement dollars, to augment their CPP and their old-age pension.

But in places like Welland and Thorold and places in my riding where housing prices do not rise dramatically each year, those seniors don't have that ability. They either have to sell their house entirely and move into an apartment to use those funds or they stay and they struggle every day. They pay outrageous hydro bills and they pay outrageous gas bills and they pay outrageous water bills from the aging infrastructure that's sadly been ignored by provincial and federal governments for years.

There was a study on workplace productivity, health and financial wellness from Manulife, one of those insurance companies that want to get our PRPP money, and from Ipsos Reid that found financially prepared employees with good pensions are more engaged; they're more productive in their workplace. They feel that the stress of their personal financial situation—they're less likely to be distracted and they are more focused at work.

Employees who are financially prepared are more likely to have healthy lifestyles and they contribute, of course, to the local economy. They're not afraid to spend that money because they know every month that cheque will keep coming.

They talked to thousands of Canadians with benefits and a retirement plan and thousands of Canadians without any retirement plan. Of those with workplace benefits and retirement savings plans, 80% with pensions were financially prepared compared to 52% without, and 70% with pensions were more likely to have a debt management plan.

So it's up to us, the members of this House, to make sure we have a progressive pension plan, a defined benefit plan that people can actually rely on in their senior years so seniors can retire with dignity—a plan that is supported by workers, because this plan is not supported by workers. It's not supported by workers, it's not supported by the unions that represent workers, and it certainly isn't going to be a vehicle for people working in temporary or precarious work.

Now, workers who cannot afford to contribute to their own RRSP or their own tax-free savings account are not going to be able to afford to contribute to a PRPP, so it's ridiculous that we're even proposing that this is a vehicle to assist probably a fairly large percentage of our population.

What workers want are jobs that pay a wage that can support them and their families. What workers want is a government to address legislation and regulation that would improve the plight of temporary agency workers, that would provide workers in precarious work with the ability to have the same wages, the same benefits, a pension plan and the same working conditions as workers who are not in a contract situation or not working for a temporary agency. Then they wouldn't need a PRPP or an ORPP, because then they would actually have the wages to save some money themselves in a vehicle that they wanted, to augment that pension plan they would have if they were treated like an employee and not like a contract or temporary worker.

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What workers want is the Liberal government to ensure that the temp and precarious situations they find themselves in have the same rules applied to them as workers who are employees of a company or an agency, and that the same ESA rules apply to those workers so that they can get their vacation pay, their termination pay or their in-lieu-of-notice pay. Actually, if they had that money, they'd be able to, perhaps, save some of it, or put it in a tax-free savings account or invest in their own RRSP.

What workers without pensions want is decent hours for decent income. They want employment equity. They don't want the men being paid more than the women. They don't want to work beside somebody who is an employee doing the same job when they are from a temp agency and they're making \$15 an hour, and that other person is making \$30 an hour.

I can tell you, Speaker, in my experience working for the Ontario Nurses' Association, we have hospitals with public dollars in this province today still paying agencies \$100 an hour for a registered nurse, when nurses actually working for the employer probably make about 40 bucks, on average. We're using public dollars to pay agencies. These nurses then get paid \$50 an hour, and the agency is making \$50 out of every hour that a registered nurse banks. We're using tax dollars to subsidize the work of the nurses to the agency. So the agency is making as much money per hour as the nurse is actually making, as opposed to the hospitals hiring permanent, full-time or part-time registered nurses. The hospitals will tell you that they can't find them, but, in fact, it isn't that they can't find them; it's that nurses, not unlike other workers in this province, want permanent, full-time jobs with pensions, with benefits, with health benefits and with a decent wage.

What workers want in the province is to be covered by the same vacation pay provisions and the same holiday pay provisions that they would have if they had been hired by that company, and they want the Employment Standards Act to not exempt them because they work in a particular sector or they work for a particular company. They want to be treated the same. They want to be treated with respect.

And what workers want is a minimal paid sick leave plan, which they don't get when they're temporary workers or if they're in precarious work. We all know, Speaker, that everyone gets sick once in a while, and if these people had a minimal sick pay and they were sick, they'd have the money to put into a tax-free savings account or into a personal RRSP without having to go without wages.

Speaker, this PRPP is something that is not going to solve the problems of people's savings here in the province, because as I said, if you can't afford to do it yourself into an RRSP, why would you put your money into a pooled RPP? I don't see our kind of pooled RPPs doing any great things over the last four years here at the Legislature. Why would you put your money into a vehicle that's actually going to take more out of the investment dollars than if you did it yourself? Instead of 2% management fees that you might pay into a personal RRSP, you're going to be paying 3% fees. The banks and the insurance companies, who don't need that money—they're making record profits across this province and across this country—don't need those fees.

So I don't know why, even if you were entering into some kind of vehicle of savings for people, you wouldn't be looking to the defined benefit plans in this province, like HOOPP and OMERS, to give you advice. They're the people who are adequately managing people's dollars, those people who, I guess, now have the luxury of being in defined benefit plans, because we see that ending, or being reduced, here across the province.

But why do you want to prop up the banks and insurance companies at the expense of the investments of people who can least afford to invest? What pensions are all about is making sure that, as people retire, they have

adequate income to be able to participate in their communities, that they're able to perhaps help their grandchildren or their great-grandchildren participate in some activities with them, that they're able to travel a little bit. You're not going to be able to do that, Speaker, with putting a couple of thousand bucks a year into an RPP, because I can tell you that a \$100,000 RRSP only buys you about \$500 to \$550 a month at the Royal Bank. That's it.

I was in the bank the other day, and there was a notice there—always at income tax time. If you want to buy an investment, you can get about \$550 a month for \$100,000. Well, people on minimum wage and people making \$15 an hour or less investing into these PRPPs are never going to have \$100,000 at the end of the day, because all they're going to have is what they put in plus a little bit of interest that they might earn, dependent on the market, and, at the end of the day, the management fees deducted. They're not going to even have that amount of \$500 a month.

I think that the government really needs to rethink this, because PRPPs are market-dependent. The management fees are carved out right off the hop. So regardless of whether the market is in a positive or a minus, they take their management fees right up front. We all saw that. Anybody who had any investments, any mutual funds or any RRSPs over the last few years, regardless of whether your investment went down by 20%, the investment fees were still there.

So the fees need to be kept low, in any event, if the government proceeds with this option. You need to keep the fees low. They need to be no higher than perhaps what HOOPP and OMERS and some of those public sector pensions are doing for 30% of the population.

There needs to be a lot more discussion with the workforce that this is going to apply to. I know that although it's not mandatory, there are issues that certainly have been raised with me about, "Okay, so for the next five years, I'm going to invest voluntarily into this PRPP. Am I going to actually be able to move that money into the ORPP when it's up and running five years from now? Is there going to be an option that will actually allow me to purchase so many years of service with those dollars?" I doubt it. I haven't actually seen that anywhere, Speaker.

I don't want us to be kind of duping people into thinking that they're going to have some significant dollars at the end of the day because they are going into this pooled vehicle, this investment vehicle, right? If you pay attention to what a lot of the experts have said, if you look at the HOOPP white paper, if you look at the—there has been a number of reports written around this PRPP. It's pretty clear that this is not the best way to be able to provide pension income for anyone in this province.

So I think it needs to be made clear to people, if the government does go forward with this, that, in fact, at the end of the day, it's really just an RRSP that you could have invested in yourself and you would have paid less management fees.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014, and to comment on some of the remarks made by the member from Welland.

Of course, this particular vehicle is just one of the many initiatives our government is taking, in addition, of course, to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan that we are proposing. We're certainly saying that the PRPP is just one of a suite of voluntary opportunities for individuals. I talk to constituents in my riding from all of the four municipalities and what I hear from them is very clearly that they want choice in how they, in fact, provide for their retirement in terms of savings opportunities. So we have TFSA's. We have, hopefully, with this bill being passed, the PRPP to offer that kind of choice, particularly in the case of this plan, to small or medium-sized businesses that may not have the capacity to offer traditional pension plans.

We had a very interesting session in my riding. The Associate Minister of Finance wanted us to convene a group for her consultation on the ORPP, and we gathered together our chambers of commerce, the board of trade for Markham, a very wide representation—in fact, I was very pleased to see CUPE came to our consultation on the ORPP. What we heard consistently is that there was a desire, of course, not only to go ahead with the ORPP, but to offer choice, depending on circumstances. So this is just one of many initiatives, and I think it's going to be an exceptionally good one, if passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, it's a pleasure to stand in this House and, in this case, speak to Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act. Our expert in our caucus, the member from York-Simcoe, has done just a magnificent job on this. As a matter of fact, she introduced Bill 50 back in 2013. The Ontario PC caucus has been on the forefront of advancing the PRPPs for quite some time. The good news is that the government is now finally realizing that we've been on the right track all along and that people, in fact, do need options for retirement.

Now, one of the things I really like and appreciate about this particular plan is the fact that it's not mandatory. I think one of the things that needs to happen—and I know that for these pension plans to really begin to take effect, they need to probably be in effect for 20, 25, 30 years or so before someone actually begins to reap the benefits of such a program. So let's start it back in the schools. Let's teach children basic math, let's teach them finance, let's teach them how to manage, so they can learn how to save for their future. Of course, with this not being a mandatory program that's being forced upon them, I think it's a great idea.

Now, also, CFIB likes it because employers don't have to opt in to this particular program. But I do like the fact that it's going to give people options by not making

it mandatory to get in there. People don't like it when things are being forced upon them. Again, I think that it's important that Ontarians have a right to save for their retirement, and I think that these PRPPs would offer this to anyone actually in Ontario itself, including the self-employed, who don't always take care of themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to be able to stand. To the comments of my colleague from Welland, she raised some great points about the real need of this plan for the average Ontarian, and the lack thereof. We know that people are in precarious work, we know that people aren't able to get jobs, and this is really going to do nothing for them.

She talked about Stelco—and that's from my home town, as you know and are from also, Speaker—and how the pensioners there are facing CCAA and there is no protection for their pensions. If we really wanted to do something for the people of this province, we would be trying to find a way to make sure that pensioners are at the top of the creditor list when it comes to companies who are bailing out on our country and just picking up and moving off.

The Minister of Community and Social Services talked about CUPE and their thoughts on this. My thoughts on CUPE today are with those who are not receiving the pay equity that they've been told they're supposed to get, and what the minister is thinking about making sure that her government is allowing these employers to keep their pay equity responsibilities. Yes, it's this minister's responsibility to make sure that she has those funds to allow that to happen.

Also, we have people in this province who are on OW and ODSP and are not able to get their paycheques just because the system has a failure. I think a lot of them will be going through the Easter weekend without any funds whatsoever until those paycheques can be spit out on Tuesday because of the fault of the SAMS program.

There are lots of things to talk about in this House. A pension plan that really could be substituted with an RRSP would probably do the job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to rise today in support of Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plan Act, 2014.

I'd like to acknowledge the comments made by some of the members in the House earlier, particularly the member from Welland and also Chatham-Kent. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that, in my opinion, this is really a very great initiative. Why? Because it's flexible; it gives people options. We know that the people of Ontario and the workers of Ontario are having challenges when it comes to saving for the future and saving for their retirement. We know that they need assistance when it comes to ensuring that they are prepared to face their senior years in the comfort that they very much deserve.

When it comes to employers and the self-employed individuals in our province, they aren't saving enough for

their retirement, because saving for the future can be challenging and difficult. This bill gives people the options that they need. It's low-cost, it's not mandatory, it's professionally managed and it's portable. That means that they can take it from place to place, so whether they're self-employed, whether they may be a contractual worker or a casual worker, they can really use this plan with other plans.

This is a great idea, and other provinces agree. I think it's time that Ontario and the people of Ontario started having an option like this, because this prepares our people and our workers for the future. We need to save now. As the member beside me earlier had said, this is really about preparing for the future and for our children. I think this bill, Bill 57, is a great way to ensure that our people in our province have the flexibility they need so that they can save in the way that they want to—save today so that they can prepare for a very comfortable future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland has two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks, Speaker, and thanks to the Minister of Community and Social Services, the members from Chatham-Kent-Essex and Hamilton Mountain and the member from Halton. It's always good to have an opportunity to speak to these things, but I think one of the biggest single problems with this plan is private sector management fees. Canadians pay 2% or more for administration of their RRSPs, whereas the large public pension plans like CPP, OMERS and HOOPP pay well less than 1% for fund administration. Those high fees actually erode their returns.

We're talking about lower-, lower-middle- and middle-class people who can't afford to save or invest today themselves, and we're going to offer them a plan that is actually going to give them less in returns than they actually could have gotten if they had invested that money into RRSPs themselves. So I think that the scheme in some way misleads workers who will participate in this plan to think that they're actually going to be better off by investing in this plan when, in fact, they could have done better if they had the ability to do it, if they had a good job, if they had a permanent job that they could count on, to actually invest some money into their own tax-free savings account or into their own RRSP. That 1% of the \$80 billion of room in RRSPs would be going to them instead of going to banks and insurance companies in this province.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Beaches-East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. What a delight to have you in the chair today, keeping a measured and judicial order in the House today.

I'm sensing in my first year here in the House a certain thematic development with respect to retirement issues. We, on this side of the House, keep bringing forward important pieces of legislation that will help people in their retirement years.

We, of course, initially started with the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. This was a plan that I campaigned on, as all our members did, and I'm sure if the members opposite were being really honest with themselves, they would have heard, as we did at the door, time and time again, what an incredible opportunity this was to have the ORPP. They would have heard that as we did.

So, true to the word, when we came back after what was once called the unnecessary election—which I've always disagreed with—

Applause.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you very much. Once we came back, we had an opportunity to bring that piece of legislation in. It's moving forward and it's in committee now, ready to be heard in clause-by-clause reading.

Then we went forward and we had Bill 70. Bill 70, by the honourable member who sits next to me, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West, my seatmate—oh, and I am sharing my time with the member from Scarborough Southwest; my apologies, Speaker—which is an act respecting protection of RSPs, retirement savings plans. We know how important that is all across Canada and other jurisdictions. When you put your money into retirement savings, should you be in bankruptcy or default, often through no fault of your own, by circumstances beyond your control, your retirement savings will be protected. That's an important piece of legislation, and that, too, has received unanimous support in this House and is moving forward to committee at the appropriate time.

Now we have Bill 57, the pooled registered retirement plan. The Minister for Community and Social Services spoke quite eloquently in her two-minute discussion about the suite of services that this is just one more addition to.

So many of us are planning for our retirement in different ways. Mortgages—it's a great way. Pay off your house and you have a place to live, if you are so lucky to be able to do so.

Mr. Mike Colle: You can't do that in Toronto with a million-dollar house.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Well, it depends on when you bought it.

Savings, guaranteed investment certificates or, as we talked about, the tax-free savings account—

Interjections.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Speaker, it's so much fun when I get heckled by my own party. Does that happen often? Is that part of the experience I'm learning around here?

Others invest in stocks and bonds. We heard members opposite in the third party talking about how they wouldn't want to take a risk with a pooled registered retirement savings plan, because who knows what it looks like at the end? It's as if they don't understand the nature of investment.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Miss Monique Taylor): Would the member from Eglinton—Lawrence come to order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: You could just card him and send him out here. He's not even in his own seat. Enforce some order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Miss Monique Taylor): Order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: What happened? As soon as it's the last speaker, all of a sudden the place goes to rack and ruin.

Other people invest in stocks and bonds. The members opposite talk about not trusting the benefit at the end of the day with the registered retirement plan because of the pooled savings, but that's the nature of investments. If they're actually telling us they don't believe people should be investing, it just speaks to disasters in how they understand the way the financial world really works. Others invest in investment properties, investment businesses, and now we have this new vehicle, the pooled retirement pension plan.

We know this is not a replacement for a defined benefit plan like the ORPP or CPP or any other defined benefit plan through a place of employment. It's not a replacement; it is an option. It's a voluntary measure which is there to enhance employment security, and it must be understood as such.

When you appreciate that so many other jurisdictions across Canada have such a similar plan—BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and even Quebec have these plans. There's a federal plan. So it just absolutely makes sense that we, in Ontario, should get behind it and do this as well.

We had consultations on this program last year, about this time, in fact. We were going forward with the plan before the election, so it's no secret to anyone in the House or the people of Ontario that this was in the works. It wasn't something we campaigned on as such, because we knew that, for the most part, every one of the members in this House understood and appreciated the benefits of it and they would be supportive. So it has been heavily consulted on.

But what's really important about this plan, I think, from the perspective of an employer—as some of you may know, I have a master's degree in labour relations, and a good part of the work that I've done as a consultant was in labour relations and the importance of employee benefits. I know the members of the third party appreciate the benefits: statutory holidays, vacations with pay, cost-of-living adjustments to salaries.

A pooled pension plan opportunity for an employer is a great way to not only attract new employment to your firm but to retain employment. Isn't that what we really want to do? As employers, we create a working relationship with our employees where they feel appreciated. Using a vehicle like this is an important way of moving forward.

I think at this time, Mr. Speaker, if it's okay with you, I will turn over my time. I'm sharing it with the member from Scarborough Southwest. I'll give him an opportunity to say a few words before the time runs out for the session today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to be able to speak today on Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014. I know we've been debating this all afternoon, but just for those who are tuning in now, it's a new type of voluntary tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicle. The PRPPs are administered by licensed third-party administrators and regulated by financial institutions with investments pooled to reduce costs and improve returns.

We basically want to have a pension plan for people who will retire in the future. We all know that the Canada Pension Plan is not enough.

Mr. Mike Colle: Enough? It's a joke.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's more than a joke.

My colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence and I were talking earlier about how expensive it is to buy a house in Toronto. The average price now is \$1 million. There are young couples out there who have an \$800,000 mortgage on their house. If you do the math, it's going to take a long time to pay off that mortgage.

The member from across the aisle mentioned the fact that you can sell your house in Toronto and move to Welland.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm ready to go.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It could be a move to Welland. I don't know what the average price in Welland is but it sure has to be lower than \$1 million.

Mr. Mike Colle: And no traffic jams.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: And no traffic jams; there isn't gridlock there either.

Mr. Mike Colle: Welland; that's the place.

Laughter.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I hope Hansard doesn't record my laugh. This is serious.

He reminds me of my father. My father is 84 years old and he keeps asking me, "How are you going to pay off your mortgage? How are you going to pay off your mortgage?" A million-dollar house—and you don't get a huge house either, but we'll save that debate for another day.

I wanted to mention that there are a number of provinces that have passed legislation similar to what we want to do: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Quebec. Basically it is to augment and help couples who will, in the future, retire.

I just want to say something about the present Canada Pension Plan. My dad is receiving it. He also receives Old Age Security. We were adding it up and it came to just over \$20,000. So you have a person living in Toronto by himself in a house—

Mr. Mike Colle: He worked for 40 years.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: He worked for 35 years at a lumber mill and he has to basically live on \$20,000 a year. You can't live on \$20,000 a year. Luckily, he saved money and he has other income from an RRSP. But you can't survive on \$20,000 a year.

I have a friend. He reached the age of 60—I'm being told by the Speaker to look at the time—

Mr. Mike Colle: Go ahead.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Go ahead and speak? You can cut me off any time, Mr. Speaker. But my friend—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I think I'll cut you off before you start laughing again. Thank you so much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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| Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB) | Oak Ridges–Markham | Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille 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 |
| Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB) | Thunder Bay–Atikokan | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| 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

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bas Balkissoon, Chris Ballard
Grant Crack, Cheri DiNovo
Han Dong, 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**

Chair / Présidente: Soo Wong
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**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
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 McDonnell, 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-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
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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