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Tuesday 20 October 2015

Mardi 20 octobre 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 20 October 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 20 octobre 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POLICE RECORD CHECKS
REFORM ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA RÉFORME
DES VÉRIFICATIONS
DE DOSSIERS DE POLICE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 7, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 113, An Act respecting police record checks /
Projet de loi 113, Loi concernant les vérifications de
dossiers de police.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It is my pleasure to speak to Bill 113 this morning, An Act respecting police record checks. I think everybody would agree that police record checks have multiplied exponentially over the years and that our administration, oversight and transparency of police record checks have not kept pace with that exponential growth. In effect, we don't even know how many police record checks are taking place or under what circumstances and what information is being provided. So this bill is a much needed and long overdue attempt to address some of the unknowns, the uncertainties and the failings of that system that we have at the present time.

Although Bill 113 does make a significant attempt and initiative to improve that system, there are some failings with the bill, in my view. I want to take a moment or two to illustrate to the members in this assembly what some of those failings are and what some of the criticisms are that I have on Bill 113, in hopes that you will take them with sincerity and consider these criticisms when it comes to committee and a further examination and evaluation of this bill.

First off, there are three clauses in Bill 113 which I think need to be seriously re-evaluated. The first one is section 22(1). I believe these next criticisms that I'm going to speak about are really about a significant undue delegation of authority by this assembly to individuals without the proper oversight. Section 22(1) allows cab-

inet to exempt anyone from any provision of this bill. Seldom do we see such broad powers being provided to cabinet to exempt any person or class of persons from any provision of this act. That could be done by order in council. The Legislature would not be aware of that exemption or who it applies to. That, clearly, is not in keeping with a transparent and open administration.

It goes on. Section 22(2)(c) allows the minister to create new offences under this act. There are offences enunciated and enumerated in this act. We can all look at them, evaluate them and debate them. But then the bill goes on to allow the minister to create new offences without legislative oversight. That's 22(2)(c). Both of those are serious and, I believe, undue delegations of authority.

Lastly—this, again, is one that I've never seen, and it speaks to our adherence, our convention and our knowledge that politicians ought not to interfere with the administration of justice or the prosecution. I'd like to ask everybody to take a look at section 19(3) of the act. Section 19(3) says, "A prosecution shall not be commenced under this section without the minister's consent." That is a worrying clause. If there is anybody here on the Liberal benches who can respond to these comments this morning, I would be very happy to hear what the rationale is behind these undue delegations of authority, specifically this one: Why will it be a requirement that the minister consents to any prosecution? No prosecution can go forward under this act without the minister's signed consent. We would never allow that, and we have never allowed that in any other statute before this House, that I'm aware of. None. It is a very, very troubling clause, especially when looked at in light of the previous two clauses that I spoke about. I do hope someone on the Liberal benches will respond to that.

Just think of it, under this act—as we know, police record checks are provided in large part by police services boards. There is a growing element of third-party providers as well, which I'll speak to later during this debate. But anybody who is not in compliance, anybody who provides improper disclosure, would generally be the police services board, as it now stands. A complainant, somebody who would be upset or found that their privacy was violated and improper disclosure was made, would, of course, have to go back to that police services board that they have the allegation against in the first place. And now, that individual, if the police services board refused to bring in information to the justice—first off, they would have to get the minister's consent to bring a charge against themselves.

0910

Second off, if an individual wanted to lay a private information with the courts to proceed with that allegation, he wouldn't be allowed to enter a private information. He would not be allowed to go to the courts to seek recourse or remedy; he would have to first go to the minister, and we know how easy that is. We know how easy it is for any individual to approach a government minister and get his or her consent before he or she puts a private information forward. That cannot be allowed to stand, in my view—cannot be allowed.

During committee hearings—because obviously this bill will pass; it's a government bill, and it will pass. But we cannot turn our administration of justice into such an animal that requires the minister's approval prior to any laying of charges under this act.

Those are the three most serious concerns that I have on this bill that I am absolutely confident to assert need to be remedied. But another important part of this is the requirement for the providers of police record checks to compile, record and document statistics, which is a great thing because we don't have any—or we have very few—statistics at the present time. That's a good step in the right direction. However, the act does not identify which statistics are to be recorded and documented. We don't know how many applications will be recorded. We don't know, if there are any refusals to disclose, if they are going to be recorded. We don't know if the duration or length of time to comply with a background check is going to be incorporated into those statistics.

I see the Attorney General. I would love the Attorney General to take a look with a fine-tooth comb at some of these comments I'm making on this bill and provide this House with some level of assurance that the right and appropriate and relevant statistics are going to be recorded. They should be enumerated within the legislation so that we know, and so we also know, then, that it becomes a requirement of the provider to provide that information.

One more element on that topic specifically is that this act is to be reviewed by the minister after five years. That is section 21, and it says, "The minister shall conduct a review of this act within five years after the day this section comes into force." But again, in the interest of transparency—and democracy demands transparency—that clause ought to include "and table his or her review with this assembly," so that we can all examine and evaluate the review. We can then examine and evaluate the statistics that have been collected, and we can then move forward in an informed and intelligent fashion about the effectiveness of Bill 113.

I think that's an important consideration. It's just not good enough for the minister to review the bill after five years and be silent or have no obligation or duty to inform the House of his or her review. That would strengthen it. I think it would also be consistent with the Premier's assertions that she wants to be the most open and transparent of all governments. You can't be open and transparent if there's no requirement to table reviews, investigations and evaluations with the House.

I want to put this forward for the minister's consideration: The enforcement of this act is in a very murky and muddied area, in my view. As I identified, anybody who has a complaint under this act is most likely to go to the police services board, who provided that disclosure. That individual is, in essence, prevented from seeking remedy in the courts for any improper disclosure. This is not just the police services board; it could also be a not-for-profit, a charitable organization or anybody else who inappropriately seeks background police record checks on an individual. Again, prosecution is dependent on the minister exercising his authorities under this act to allow a prosecution to go forward.

I think the bill would be far more substantive, complete and effective for the people of Ontario if there was an independent body that was authorized to be the enforcement and compliance agency for this legislation. I can think of groups such as the OIPRD. The independent police review might be an effective and appropriate organization for allegations or complaints under this act to be brought forward, just as we do today. If a police officer is alleged to have been engaged in improper use of force or misconduct, individuals have the opportunity to go to the OIPRD. The same could apply with this legislation. There are other avenues; the SIU, I guess, could be another one.

Right at the moment, we've created a real juggernaut for individuals, when this act gets passed, that will have statute to protect their privacy, will have statutory authority to indicate how it is to be done, but there will be no remedy for failure to perform to the standards that this act sets forward. I think those are important clauses for the government to re-examine.

At least, in the minimum, I think there is a duty to this House that the government provide us with the rationale and an explanation of why we have this tremendous undue delegation of authority and this complete contradiction to the separation of our courts and separation of our law enforcement from the political arm of government.

I know the Liberal members will have two minutes to respond. If anybody there could respond as to why it is that the minister must consent to a prosecution under this bill—I know the attorney general is here. Can you imagine, if every time a police officer goes to lay a charge, instead of going to the crown attorney and seeking advice in the laying of the charges, the police officer would have to go to the Minister of the Attorney General and get her consent before a charge is laid. Absolutely astonishing—I don't understand how that can be viewed as an appropriate clause.

0920

So once again, table the review. After five years, after the government has reviewed, examined and evaluated the efficacy of Bill 113, table that review with the House so that we can all see it.

Second, consider that enforcement and compliance be done by a separate agency, not this less-than-clear view that we see now, and certainly without the need for the minister's consent for any prosecution.

Also, enumerate the statistics and the data that are to be collected so that we can all understand. I would think the minister would want this as well. How can the minister review an act in five years' time if it's not enumerated what data is going to be collected and how it's going to be documented and who is going to have access to it?

Finally, that cabinet can exempt any person or any class of persons from any provision of this bill: I always grew up and understood that neither prince nor pauper is above or beneath the law, that we have a general application of the law that affects everyone. Why we would give this authority to cabinet to exempt anybody or any class of people from any provision of this bill without coming back to this House and seeking our consent is unacceptable, as well as section 22(2), where the minister can create new offences by regulation without coming back to this House seeking our consent.

With that, Speaker, I'm looking forward to other members in the House responding to those concerns and looking forward to getting a handle on police record checks. I'll finish off with this one statement—I think it's important—from the civil liberties: “The bottom line is that widespread, unnecessary police record checks do not contribute to public safety; they undermine it.”

I think it's important that we get a handle on them and do these police record checks properly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's always great to get up and respond when a member is debating in the House.

I just want to focus in on two areas of this bill, though. The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington actually spoke about this general application piece and the ability for cabinet to exempt certain classifications or individuals. In my experience in the health care field, there certainly have been a couple of issues while I was working there. One was the length of time it actually took to get police checks. We would have 100 vacancies, for example, in a large health system in Niagara, with nurses waiting to get a job, so their employment was impacted. Sometimes it could take eight, nine, 10 weeks to actually get a police check, so not good for patient care when you are actually working short in our health care facilities.

I'm not saying that it's a bad thing to do police checks in a sector where we are dealing with a lot of vulnerable patients, but there needs to be a way—if the government is going to put in new regulations, then it needs to put the resources in place as well to be able to actually accomplish those checks in a timely way.

The second piece was also in the health care sector. You could have a nurse who had practised faithfully for 40 years, retires, decides to come back and work casual in the health care field, and suddenly now requires a police check, after having practised for 40 years without any issues whatsoever, reporting to their respective college—nothing on their college record. Suddenly, they too have to go and get a police check, and they have to stand in line and wait for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak in support of Bill 113.

I'm very, very pleased to support our bill, the government bill. I listened very attentively to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and to my colleague from Welland. Some of the suggestions and comments he made will also be heard when we go to committees and hearings. But I want to bring the member's comments forward. He focused specifically on enforcement and the role of the minister, the cabinet minister. I heard you, but I think the member opposite also has to recognize that this particular proposed legislation has been heard from various stakeholders as well. I know every member of this House needs to recognize that we need to balance public safety and respecting privacy.

This past week we had a constit week, and I spent much of my constit week dealing with the issue of police background checks. One issue—we have been very, very clear that when constituents need to go to work, as well as in a volunteer capacity, because every child who graduates from Ontario's system must do 40 hours of volunteer work—we know that. They may be asked to do a police background check. I had to be dealing with this all last week with respect to this particular area. We now have kids who are 14 or 15 years of age being asked to do a police background check. It is absolutely important that we make sure we have a balance between public protection and safety, and respecting and protecting privacy, because at the end of the day, there have been records shared—especially mental health—that affect careers, but, more importantly, employment opportunity and also travelling. We've seen all that. It is a concern, and I know the government is prepared to repair that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments? The member for Leeds–Grenville and official opposition House leader.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Speaker.

Interjection: Deputy leader.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Deputy leader; I apologize.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you for your kind words, Speaker. I appreciate that.

I just want to thank the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for his comments. I think his speech this morning was very well thought out. I was disappointed that the members opposite haven't addressed some of his concerns. I think he was pretty clear that subsection 19(3):

“No prosecution without consent

“(3) A prosecution shall not be commenced under this section without the minister's consent”—I agree with him. I think, before this bill gets to committee, one of you has to stand up and address that. Why is that in that section?

As well, I want to commend the member. Over and over again, he talks about the fact that—not just with this

bill, but with many other bills—we're taking our responsibility as members of the Legislative Assembly and we're allowing the minister to deal with it. To have a review by the minister five years after this bill is proclaimed and not bring it back for a debate or discussion on the floor of this House—I can't believe that we allow that to happen time after time after time. We need to make sure that we have meaningful debate, discussion and evaluation after this bill becomes law.

I also feel that we should get the government to address some of his concerns about enforcement and compliance. I think he makes some very valid comments about the agency and that review process.

I do, just before I sit down, want to give credit, again, to my colleague the member for Dufferin—Caledon. She has a bill, Bill 79, the Helping Volunteers Give Back Act, that I think would make an exceptional amendment. It would require that volunteers would not have to get multiple background checks. I think it's a good bill. I'm going to put it on the record again that I think it should be an amendment to this act.

Thank you, Speaker, and I want to congratulate Mr. Hillier on a fine speech this morning.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to rise in this House and, today, talk on Bill 113, An Act respecting police record checks. I don't think anyone is arguing that we don't have to improve this situation, when volunteers want to volunteer, good people want to volunteer, and information comes up for something for which they have never been charged, never been convicted, and yet it could impact how they want to help the community.

I think we support the principle of this bill, but I would also, although I disagree with him on many political issues, like to commend the member from Lanark—Frontenac—that's a longer name than my riding, Speaker—Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. As I was listening, and I listened attentively, and I don't have a long history here, but it did strike me as passing strange—a phrase I haven't heard in a while—that the minister would have to approve if there was a prosecution.

In the body of the bill—it hasn't been mentioned yet—even the minister's method of approval seems a bit odd. Subsection 19(4), the minister's proof of consent: "The production of a document that appears to show that the minister has consented to a prosecution under this section is admissible as evidence of the minister's consent." Even that is kind of murky. This is a bill about getting away from the murkiness of police record checks, and, instead, while they're trying to do a good thing, they're making it even more murky. This has to be fixed as this bill goes to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank all the members who commented. I am a little bit disappointed that the member from Scarborough from the Liberal benches did not respond to any of my comments about why. Obviously, she is just willing to accept that some smart people that they listened to said they should do the bill like this. That's not good enough when you're in what appears to be contravention of our conventions and traditions, and contrary to even the spirit and the essence of due process and the rule of law. We need more than "I've listened to some smart people, and they said it was all okay."

I didn't speak about the delays, but it was brought up in the comments of the member from Welland. I could have gone on for 20 minutes, easily, just on the number of constituents who have come to my office who have lost job opportunities because of delays in getting their background checks done. That's why I was focusing on this review and the enumerating of the statistics. If we don't know what statistics we're going to demand, we have no way of ensuring the accountability; there's no way for us to help our constituents or be able to save them down the road.

"We've made it better"? We don't know. There are hundreds, thousands, millions possibly, of these background checks going on. We all hear of the tremendous delays that can occur, and also lost files and all kinds of things that have a consequence to our constituents. Oftentimes they lose either some period of work or lose out on job opportunities altogether. I do hope the Liberal members rise to the occasion and make this bill better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for his presentation this morning.

Further debate.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It is always my honour to stand and speak on behalf of the residents of my riding of London—Fanshawe on this bill today, Bill 113, An Act respecting police record checks.

Last week, the NDP critic, my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, commended the government on introducing this bill. We've heard positive responses from members on this side of the House that this initiative is definitely something that is long overdue. There have been contradiction, and conflict, on this issue when people are looking for background checks and sometimes what results come out, and there are limited opportunities because of the information that is presented.

I want to echo some concerns that the member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton has also presented. Several organizations, as well as people from across this province, may have the same concerns as well. There are some very good aspects to those bills, so first I want to start with those.

The bill indicates that non-conviction information about an individual will not be disclosed in response to a police record check, in response to a criminal check or a judicial matters check. This section is imperative because there are cases when non-convictions actually appear as

part of a police check, and they restrict, as we mentioned before, volunteering and employment.

My colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton highlights some of these facts, but I think they're well worth repeating so that members of Legislature really understand the impact of what's happening with this bill. It is a good bill, but we can't forget that our job is to be very critical of what's in the bill so that we can make improvements and offer suggestions to the government.

What exactly are non-conviction records? These involve, according to the John Howard Society, calls to 911 for assistance, victimization, mental health crises involving the police, being questioned by the police, and arrests and charges that did not result in convictions. Another thing that some people may not realize in this bill is that if you were a witness to a crime or just a witness in some kind of incident and the police spoke to you, you could have that on your record. If you get a check done, that will appear just because you were questioned. Most people don't even realize that that's something that can come up on a background check for them.

The examples that we've been talking about today are on mental health. I presented a bill in this House, Bill 95, a mental health and addictions bill, which helps people who are experiencing mental health issues and addiction have a better opportunity for access to those services.

Right now, many health care treatments, programs or therapies are in the community. We all know that those things belong in the community. That's what patients want, but we also need to have the resources and the management of those therapies and treatments that are out in the community to be implemented so that patients have access to those things in a timely fashion.

What I think I can say from what has been going on in London is that the police services have contact—I've talked to the police chief. Once a year, I contact him to get an update on what's going on, and each year he expresses to me that a disproportionate amount of their emergency 911 calls are coming from mental health patients—mental health issues.

What has happened there is that people are not able to access mental health. They've gone to the hospital or to other areas or organizations and there's a backlog. They are confused on where to go. So their mental health illness continues longer than really they need it to, perhaps, because they haven't been able to seek assistance. Then they reach a crisis point where they don't know where else to turn. What they do is they call 911. The police respond. There are incidents where perhaps things are said of a violent nature. So the police will write the report. In that case, there is a record of that incident. It may have been a result of the person coming to a boiling point where they couldn't access health care in the time that they needed it and now they're at a crisis point. That's a really, really unfortunate status of events, when someone who's in a vulnerable position ends up with a record check because of other reasons—they couldn't access health in a timely fashion—therefore limiting

opportunities such as employment, education, as well as even rental homes, insurance and volunteering.

0940

I have had a couple of examples, as we all have had, of constituents calling my office, and the examples that they have articulated are very real effects in their life that have disadvantaged them. One person applied for funding through the MTCU, and they just had fines, apparently, on their record which were years and years old. They made arrangements to pay those fines, but then they were told it was going to take at least—again, the length of time—five months for that to come off their record.

There are many opportunities that have gone by for people in the London–Fanshawe area where they are trying to get funding for a second career, and they may have this situation where there's a fine and now they've got to wait five months. That affects which career choice you're going to make. It is something that we need to address. We need to make sure that record checks that don't include criminal behaviour or criminal convictions are not part of this equation.

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt talked about high school students doing their 40 hours of volunteer work in order to graduate with their diploma. Speaker, I can tell you that's something that is a concern as well. I was talking to a staff member just recently in the legislative building about this particular issue. My concern, when I read through the bill, was that if you're going to submit an application or your name to an organization where you want to volunteer, and they say to you, "Mrs. Smith, you need to obtain a records check," and you say, "Sure, no problem"—as far as they know, they have nothing on their record, so they go to the police and they ask for a police records check. The police records check then comes back—and one good thing in this bill is you have to give consent. I applaud the government for putting consent in this bill so the person who is applying for any position realizes that is actually happening. They give consent for that. So they go to the police station, they get their records check back, they get called by the police, they go in and they see their records check. Lo and behold, there's "I'm a witness to an event." There's really nothing that prevents them from becoming a volunteer or getting a job. But in this particular incident, where the high school student that the member from Scarborough–Agincourt was talking about—there's an example: The high school student was a witness to an incident. Prior to this act—that's what I want to clarify—that records check was taken by the person who was ordered to get the records check and given to that organization. There's a problem with that. I think that's flawed. That records check should not be a document that you pass on to a third party. All kinds of questions are raised in that respect. What happens to that records check? What kind of privacy and confidentiality practices does that organization have? That organization can have good intentions, because a lot of not-for-profit organizations do have good intentions. But even though it's an innocent example of a records check piece of information

that can come out on a records check for someone, it shouldn't be public knowledge to anyone but the police and the person ordering it.

This is where we're talking about the high school student. High school students may not question the process. This is where information shouldn't be out there without proper checks and balances before it's released. I don't even agree with the fact that it should be released to a third party. I think it should be between the police and the person ordering it, and if there is a concern, then the organization is called and told there's a concern. They don't need to know what kind of concern or what the context of it is. That's all they need to know. Or even better, the person who is getting the records check can identify if that is going to be a concern to the organization or not-for-profit where they are applying for a job and they can just say, "You know, I've decided I'm not pursuing that opportunity." Then that leaves it so that they don't have to actually say, "There's something on my records check and I'm not willing to volunteer," or "I'm prevented from volunteering." That's another reason why it should go no further than the person ordering the records check.

I'd like to know, and I guess I'll have to enquire about this and I'm going to ask the government: Is that in place, where once that records check is ordered, it doesn't go any further than the person ordering it? If there's a concern, it's either the police say there is a concern or not a concern, and no one needs to know what the context is of that. I'd like to know what happens at that point, because right now, my understanding is—and I've had calls in my office—the practice is the organization gets a copy of that.

Another example I had in my office, Speaker: A young man was wrongfully accused of a crime, went through the terrible experience of being put through the court system, and then he was acquitted. That was on his records check. His parents called, thoroughly upset, just devastated that their son's future was going to be affected because of this record information on there. Again, the son was applying, a young man, and he was told it was going to take five months for that records check to be corrected. So even when you have the expunging or the pardon on things, it can become a serious issue.

The last example: A student in our area was applying for the nursing program, as the member from Welland talked about. She wanted to become a health care provider. Many, many years ago she experienced—this is an illness. Mental health is an illness. We've got to get away from the stigma of mental health. People have an illness, they have a mental health concern; they seek help, they get medication and they can get better. They do get better and they're very functioning citizens in our society.

The student had a situation where she wasn't feeling well. Police were involved. Again, phrases were expressed that were of a violent nature and she couldn't get into the course because it's a requirement to have a records check in order to get your co-op experience.

That was really devastating for that student. She wrote a wonderful piece to us, an email, explaining how she did have a difficult time in her life as a young woman, experienced some stressful situations in her life that were out of her hands, that affected her inadvertently, and therefore she had some mental health issues, and she's not denying that. Identifying that you have mental health issues and seeking help is wonderful, because it is an illness, a mental health issue, and should be treated as such.

Now she's gotten better. She's healthy and she wants to pursue her career in nursing, and she was stopped.

I definitely think that looking at non-criminal offences is a huge piece of the positive nature of this bill. It's going to help a lot of people in functioning in life in many ways.

I want to talk about my mental health bill again, and the reason I want to do that is because Bill 95 is affecting so many people when it comes to issues, even housing. When you go to get a home, people are discriminated against when they have mental health issues. Having Bill 95 pass through committee—it's gone to committee, but bringing it to committee for debate and for people to present—I think would help people access mental health and give them a little bit of hope that they can move on with their life.

I was at a poverty seminar this weekend and there were different aspects to poverty: homelessness, as we all know; health care is another, accessing health care. There was also food stability. That was important. Food security, that was important. We talked about those different aspects of it.

The other one, of course, was jobs. The precarious work that's happening, the contract work that's happening—people don't have benefits. When you don't have benefits and you're working in a stressful situation and you don't know if your job is going to be there for a few years to come, sometimes that adds stress to mental health. You don't have benefits, so you can't even access services. It all ties in: precarious work, food security, homelessness and health care. I think passing Bill 95 would be a positive step to addressing some of those issues that I talked about and that we had a discussion about in a seminar this weekend.

0950

I also went to an event last week in my riding: international World Homeless Day. We were at the London InterCommunity Health Centre and we were talking to a gentleman who has been working with homelessness issues and people experiencing homelessness for about 26 years. The question was posed to him, "What do you think the main cause of homelessness is?" You know what he said, Speaker—which is actually quite surprising, because there are an accumulation of reasons why people end up homeless. He said it was poverty. Poverty is the number one factor of homelessness. You can have mental health, you can have all kinds of other issues, but if you don't have the means to afford a home, to buy—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Drugs.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes—to buy the medication you need, to buy the food that you need—at this poverty seminar, we heard a real case example of two people. This woman came from out west. She came to London. She was promised a contract position that fell through. She had to wait five months until her unemployment insurance kicked in. She ended up in a situation where she was homeless. She is still struggling to get out of that. It affected her self-esteem and her confidence. It was a true-to-life story.

I think the face of poverty has changed. It's not just the stigma that people have, the stereotype that people have perpetuated in their mind. Poverty can hit any one of us when there is illness in the family or you lose your job.

Tying that in, unfortunate situations that occur when someone has interaction with police when they're not criminal need to be addressed. Having this bill at least is a good step forward into looking at non-conviction, non-criminal records check information that will help people with those employment and volunteer situations that we talked about.

I did want to mention a comment by the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. He is correct in saying that the powers that the minister is being given under this bill with regard to determining whether prosecution is going to be admissible in this situation when someone does commit an offence—when an organization wilfully contravenes this act, there's a fine of \$5,000. That is concerning because the powers given to the government, whether or not they decide the law has been broken, are in question. Definitely, we want to talk about that a little further, even examine it in committee.

Being in that process when it does go to committee, I'd really be interested, even if I'm not assigned to that committee, to sit in and listen because, in many ways, this touches all of us. We can have unfortunate situations where we are involved with the police, whether it's health care, whether it's being a witness, whether it's fines or whether it's being falsely accused of something. It needs to be addressed.

This is a very serious bill; I'm glad it's being talked about. I'm glad we're looking at it in the intent that it's meant to help people with non-conviction criminal offences on their records check.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to this bill. I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Good morning. I would just like to add a few comments and respond to the member on the opposite side. I'll just go back to my speaking notes and the opening remarks made between the minister and myself as the PA. It says that this legislation, if passed, will establish and standardize three types of record checks, as follows: a criminal record check, which is where only criminal records will be released; a criminal record and judicial matters check, which is pretty straightforward; and I think the one that the member

across the way expressed, a vulnerable sector records check.

I would like to assure her, because the minister quite clearly stated—I will read his exact words. It says, “Quite simply, a police record check should never disclose personal health information or identify that someone was a victim or witness to a crime.” She was outlining someone having a problem before; they had a mental health situation and their information was revealed. Clearly, what we've put in this legislation will stop that from happening in the future.

The other issue that she raised was someone trying to seek employment or volunteering. The legislation is very clear, and the Hansard would have it very clear that the minister made it very clear that in the vulnerable record check, the person that is being checked receives a copy of the record, has an opportunity to ask for a review and, based on those circumstances, that person can clearly state, “I'm not interested in the job I'm applying for and, therefore, do not proceed to send my record check to the particular employment opportunity” or agency or whatever. It's clearly in the minister's speech and it's clearly in the legislation.

Basically, the rest of it, I would say that the member supports the legislation, so let us all support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Dufferin–Caledon and deputy leader of the official opposition.

Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the member from London–Fanshawe's 20-minute speech on Bill 113.

You might appreciate that I have a personal interest in Bill 113, not because I ask for a lot of personal police record checks, but because I know a lot of people in my community, and I'm sure we all do, that spend a great deal of their time volunteering for organizations and community groups throughout Ontario. There is an opportunity in Bill 113 to improve that process and make it easier for people to volunteer. So I will once again put in a plug for one section of the bill that specifically references that individuals have the opportunity to review their police record check information before deciding to release it to the requester i.e. an employer or volunteer organization.

I would like to suggest that we add an amendment to that and say allow that police record check, once it has been provided and reviewed by the individual, to multiple volunteer organizations. We all know that people who volunteer tend to volunteer in more than one organization—on behalf of more than one organization. This will simplify the process so that that mom or dad who is reading in their child's school can take that same police record check and volunteer for the local Big Brothers Big Sisters and volunteer for the local organization that has an event once a year. The process of getting a police record check for a one-time event is too onerous and too time consuming. That's the amendment I'd like to see in Bill 113, and then I'd be proud to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm glad the member from London–Fanshawe had the opportunity to really zone in on the whole mental health piece, because I believe that police checks probably disproportionately affect people with mental health issues. Many times, people with mental health issues, during a 911 call, for example, or a call from their family, are combative. They can be combative. They're off their medications. They're not really in control of themselves initially. In many cases, I've seen them being charged by the police. They're initially charged with either assaulting police or resisting arrest because the police—they're not necessarily known to the police. That record follows them for the rest of their lives. Many times, people with mental health issues don't have continuity in the workforce, and so volunteering is an opportunity for them to actually gain those skills that they need to perhaps get into the workforce when they have been able to successfully access mental health treatment.

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But mental health is sorely underfunded in this province and across Canada. The services are just not out there and available. Every day I have parents, of teenagers in particular, coming into my office trying to access even an initial assessment for their child, let alone any psychotherapy which would assist these teenagers.

To have something like this on a record following a 15-year-old or a 16-year-old for the rest of their lives really is discriminatory in my view, and so we need to do what we can do to fix this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one more question and comment.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I'm very proud to speak to this bill. I thank the member from Welland and all of the members that have spoken prior to her.

It is one of those things—I have had several police record checks during my time. As a school board trustee, I had to go through a police record check. As a baseball coach, I did the same. It was a benefit to me—I have been stopped by the police on several occasions for driving infractions at times and that didn't appear on the record during that time that I was known to police. That would have prohibited my progress and maybe I wouldn't even be in this House today.

So although there is a value in police record checks in protecting civil liberty, we also have to be mindful that it can restrict a person to gain employment; it can be a black mark for a person going forward, whether it is to college or to university and so forth.

It's a good bill. It's a bill that provides a balance—a balance that protects civil liberties and also protects the vulnerable sector, as children and elderly folks have to be protected and we have to ensure those protections are in place. But at the same time, we have to value the liberty and the freedom we have in a democratic society for people to move about freely and to take part in the democratic process without the impediment of a police record check standing in the way for something that was not criminal—they were just pulled over perchance, for whatever reason.

Again, I support this bill wholeheartedly. It's a step in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member from London–Fanshawe for her reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the members that gave the questions and comments.

I do appreciate the fact that things are changing under this bill, but the reason we're here is to give—I had given a little bit of background as to the barriers and blocks that people have found before this bill came into effect, so it's good to see that this bill is a positive step in changing those things.

The reason this bill has been presented is because it's been far too long that many of us who have known people or have received calls in our constituency offices know that there is a need for this bill. People have been needlessly prevented from opportunities for their future, to get on with their lives.

So I'll have to say, I congratulate the government for coming up with this bill because there was a need and they are trying to meet that need. Yes, I think there is still room for improvement and the reason being is because when the legislation is presented in this House, my thought is that it should be scrutinized the most that we can right now. Once it gets released, we don't want it coming back where people have been negatively affected because we haven't looked at all the pieces that we can make sure that each part of this bill is going to help people and not adversely affect them.

In committee, I hope that when presenters come through, they look at each part of this bill and give feedback, and that the government listens if there are ways to improve upon what they've presented.

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

I recognize the Minister of Northern Development.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The government wishes to continue the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Speaker. I wanted to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member for Burlington and the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today on behalf of the Cambridge constituencies. I know that they will join me in thanking Gary Goodyear for his years of service to our community in Cambridge. They're also with me in congratulating Bryan May, our new MP for Cambridge.

This recent election actually relates to what I wanted to say this morning, Mr. Speaker. In the final days leading up to the election, there was a lot of excitement. I

certainly was excited to see all parts of the campaign from the federal standpoint. But in particular, in the final days of the election in Cambridge, there were more and more social media postings from folks, I'm sure in the heat of the moment, really without recognizing that tampering with elections signs is an infraction of the Canada Elections Act. There were a lot of issues regarding election signs in our area: things that were posted on YouTube, things that were posted on media, sometimes showing the individuals who were involved in doing things—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry to interrupt, but of course we're dealing with police record checks, with Bill 113. I would ask the member to bring her comments back to the bill.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you. I was bringing this back to it, because what we were talking about was looking at police records checks for the future. When I looked at some of the material on social media that was coming in in the last couple of days of the election, I noted there were several young people who were involved in this, too. It would be a real shame for them if, in the future, they were going to be penalized under a record check because in the heat of the moment, they didn't recognize that things were going on that they shouldn't have been doing.

In Waterloo region, we have the crime prevention council, which is really a basis for how I perceive the community: the community policing, the focus on youth in our area by members of all parts of the community, representing education, youth organizations and senior organizations.

We have a very strong relationship with policing in our area, and I know that they are very supportive of having the new legislation here. It builds on the LEARN guidelines that were developed by policing, civil liberties, mental health organizations, community safety organizations, non-profits and business partners, and is also being followed by approximately 70% of police forces across the province. This will ensure a very consistent approach across Ontario, from the OPP to the smallest police force.

I wanted to reiterate again that those who have done things in the heat of the moment, especially our youth, may face unnecessary barriers to employment in the future due to inappropriate non-conviction and non-criminal information, such as mental health records being disclosed during routine police record checks or any of the other situations that we've been talking about. Many of these individuals had schooling and careers placed in jeopardy because of inappropriate use of police records checks. In some cases, they lost out on employment and other important opportunities. That's precisely why I support this legislation: to make sure that those folks in our community of Cambridge are protected from inappropriate uses.

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We've heard from all our partners, certainly at the crime prevention council table, as well as in my office in the last little while, again dealing with some of the youth

who are having to deal with some of the police record checks that have shown up with inappropriate behaviour, often due to their age.

There's a need for consistent practices and policies across this province. So, if passed, this legislation would help remove those unnecessary barriers and increase employment, volunteer and education opportunities. It will prohibit the release of non-criminal information such as mental health records, and it will strictly limit the release of non-conviction records.

I think that this goes a long way to protecting the members in my community and, indeed, the youth across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to rise in the House this morning to speak to this very important piece of legislation and join my colleagues from across the aisle, and the member for Cambridge and her eloquent remarks this morning—and, if the House will indulge me, say a note of congratulations to Karina Gould, the new MP-elect for Burlington, and thank Mike Wallace, the former member for Burlington, for his many years of service to our community as the federal member.

I think that's incredibly important. This is an extraordinary opportunity that we have on all sides of the House. I must say I'm enjoying the conversation and the debate today because, precisely, it focuses on the tenets of fairness and the judicious application of information that falls into police hands.

I'm proud to be part of the police family. My late husband was a police officer. I know the serious way in which he took police record checks. Quite often at the detachment, he would be there and someone would come in for a criminal record check. This would often be someone who was volunteering in their community.

We all know how we value our volunteers, so it's important that we take a look at the law and how it's applied, and make sure it's applied fairly and judiciously, and that that doesn't create any kind of barrier to people in our communities who want to put their names forward. Certainly, if information is found that is inappropriate, that will be acted upon, but it's very important that we take great care. This legislation will avoid precisely the kind of release of non-conviction and mental health information that my colleague from Cambridge mentioned. That can be debilitating and often damaging in an unnecessary way.

I'm proud that our government has introduced the Police Record Checks Reform Act. It would develop the province's first-ever clear, consistent and comprehensive framework for how police record checks are conducted in Ontario. It was developed in a multi-stakeholder environment after significant consultation. It is a response to the public, who have said that they want that judicious application. It ensures public safety while respecting privacy. It targets that delicate balance between the release of inappropriate information and the adjudication of our public judicial process, both of which are incredibly

important. It is based on the principles of fairness, to ensure the appropriate use of police record checks.

We've heard from many Ontarians who have faced unnecessary barriers due to inappropriate non-conviction and non-criminal information, such as mental health records, being disclosed during routine police record checks. Many of these individuals had schooling and careers placed in jeopardy because of this and, in some cases, lost out on employment and other important opportunities.

I was reading, when I was getting ready for my remarks this morning, about a gentleman in Sudbury who inadvertently found himself in a difficult situation in a traffic case where he leaned over, to quiet his young child in the back, took his gaze away from the road, and gently placed his hand on his child's knee. That was a case where the accusation landed him in trouble and prevented him from pursuing the kinds of career opportunities that he might have. It's precisely cases like this that we want to avoid.

We've also heard from our partner stakeholders in police services, businesses and volunteer organizations that there's a need for consistent practices and policies across our province.

Again, this legislation would help remove those unnecessary barriers and increase employment, volunteer and education opportunities. It does it by prohibiting the release of non-criminal information such as mental health records and strictly limiting the release of non-conviction records.

We're also establishing a specific test to ensure that all necessary information is provided in vulnerable sector checks so that those who need it most, like our children and seniors, continue to be protected. That speaks to the delicate balance that's achieved between protection and guarding the law.

Again, I invite all members of the House to speak to this bill and support it. It's an important step forward in our province. Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being 10:15 of the clock, this House stands in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Today we have a new legislative page from Oakville: Julia Empey. On the very first day, Julia's father, Brian Empey, is here, and her grandmother Joyce Smith. They're joining us today for question period. Please give them a warm Queen's Park welcome.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to welcome Alex Gill, executive director of ONEIA; Grant Walsom, XCG consulting and ONEIA vice-chair; and Marc Chabot, CH2M and chair of Environment Industry Day 2015.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: We're going to be joined very shortly by members from OASIS, the Ontario Agencies

Supporting Individuals With Special Needs. We will be joined by Michelle Marshall, executive director; David Barber, the current president; and Ann Kenney, the incoming president. They will be hosting a reception today from 5 to 7 p.m. in room 230.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to introduce the new page captain, Nicole Haim, from my riding. Her mother is here, Karine Benzacar; her brother Max Haim; and her grandmother Vivian Benzacar. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure as well to welcome Alex Gill, executive director of the Ontario Environment Industry Association; and Grant Walsom and Marc Chabot, the chair of Environment Industry Day, which we're going to be recognizing here in the Legislature.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On behalf of the member from Halton, I want to welcome page Julia Empey's father, Brian Empey, and grandmother Joyce Empey. They are in the members' gallery today, and we welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to welcome Isa Topbas. He has joined my office through the Ontario Legislative Intern Programme.

Miss Monique Taylor: On behalf of my seatmate, the member from Essex, I would like to congratulate our page captain today, Marco Di Laudo, and welcome his father, Dino Di Laudo, to the Legislature today. Welcome.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to welcome a constituent and friend, Chris Farley Ratcliffe, who's here this morning. He's familiar with the building, having worked for the Minister of Health for a number of years. Good morning and welcome, Chris.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Earlier this morning, I had the pleasure of meeting with Mark Vanderheyden, RWDI; Craig Stainton from the Ontario Ground Water Association; and Ellen McGregor of Fielding Chemical Technologies. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my pleasure to introduce our new OLIP intern in my office, Matthew Banninga. Pleased to have you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: As you know, this is national Waste Reduction Week. On the occasion of the Ontario Environment Industry Association reception day, we have Alex Gill, the executive director of ONEIA; Grant Walsom from XCG consulting and their vice-chair; and Marc Chabot from CH2M HILL. The reception, Mr. Speaker, for all members—I hope you'll attend—is between 5 and 7 this evening in the legislative dining room.

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a group of residents coming from Scarborough–Agincourt, from the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, better known as CICS. They'll be coming in shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today with us in the Speaker's gallery, I would ask that the members please join me in welcoming a visiting member of the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries, who is on attachment this week to our assembly: the

chief clerk to the secretary of the Senate at the Alabama Senate, Ms. Joyce Wright. Welcome, Joyce.

Just before we move into question period, I would refer to this morning. This morning, there was a little bit of back and forth in a friendly way. I'm going to provide you with a little bit of a first part of the question time, and I won't steal it from you, to give your thanks to those individuals who represented us at the federal election. So give yourself a little bit of time to say your piece, and I won't steal the time from your question period, but I will ask you to move on.

It's now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would, too, at this time, on behalf our leader, Patrick Brown, and the PC caucus, like to offer our congratulations to Prime Minister-elect Justin Trudeau on his victory last night. We wish him the very best in governing Canada.

I would also like to congratulate Thomas Mulcair and Prime Minister Harper for their campaigns, and thank Stephen Harper for his 10-year service to Canada.

To the Minister of Energy: For years now, we in the opposition have warned about the dire consequences due to the government's reckless handling of the energy system. Families and businesses cannot afford Liberal energy policies, yet the government continues to go down the same path. Last week, those fears were confirmed again when a substantive increase in hydro rates was released under the cover of Thanksgiving constituency week.

Ontarians are tired of the Liberal government not being open and transparent with them about their hydro bills.

Speaker, will the minister admit that the reason the government always releases these numbers when the House is not sitting is that they recognize how damaging these increases are to families and to the province's economy, and it underlines their disastrous management of our electricity system?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member knows that our 2013 long-term energy plan projected rate increases over a 20-year period and that the increases announced last week are below those projections.

In addition, the member knows we are continuing to mitigate rates with the new Ontario Electricity Support Program, which will reduce rates for modest-income families by \$360 per year.

In addition, the debt retirement charge imposed by the Conservatives is being removed from the bill starting in about nine weeks, saving homeowners another \$70 per year.

These are in addition to existing programs, which give seniors a property tax credit of up to \$1,131 per year, and

northern Ontarians have a tax credit of up to \$221 per year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's another shell game proposed by the Liberals, but the people in Ontario are not being fooled.

As announced last week, on November 1 rates are up again. At peak, they will be 17.5 cents a kilowatt hour. That is more than four times what they were when the Liberals came to power.

Last winter, our offices were inundated with messages from residential and commercial ratepayers who had no idea how they would pay their hydro bills.

Now, in less than two weeks, power is going up a staggering 8.7% for on-peak rates, rates that were already too high.

Speaker, how can the minister justify these extreme price increases to seniors trying to stay warm in their homes and on a fixed budget, and to Ontario families who have no idea how they're going to pay their bills this winter?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, neighbouring jurisdictions, starting in the United States, typically experience higher residential rates than Ontario. Comparing our peak or highest price to US states, we see higher rates in New Jersey, at 17 cents per kilowatt hour; Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Rhode Island at 19 cents. In Connecticut and New York, prices are roughly 22 cents per kilowatt hour, and states like California—18 cents per kilowatt hour—also experience prices higher than those in Ontario.

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While Ontario has already made the necessary infrastructure upgrades to transition off dirty coal, many of these jurisdictions still rely on coal for a significant part of their supply mix. This means prices could likely increase as they switch to cleaner forms of generation, and many jurisdictions, like Michigan, Nova Scotia, Maryland and Pennsylvania—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, fun with numbers, like that reference to a cup of coffee, but the people know better. Once these new rates come into effect, it will further entrench Ontario as one of the most expensive energy jurisdictions in all of North America. I can remember when the minister called these incentives nothing more than a cup of coffee; however, with this increase, the average ratepayer will pay over \$120 more per year, and more if you're in a detached dwelling.

Speaker, the minister knows that energy poverty is a fact in this province, and it is hurting Ontario families. It is deepening due to the arrogance of their mismanagement of the file. Ontarians cannot afford the projected hydro increases due to your reckless energy plans.

Speaker, can the minister stand up now, stop serving coffee and acknowledge the harm he is doing to Ontario families, or does he just not care?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member chooses to ignore the fact that we're starting a new Ontario Electricity Support Program that will reduce rates for modest-income families by \$360 per year. I've already indicated as well that the debt retirement charge is coming off the bills.

But most importantly, particularly for rural areas, we're doing a very significant initiative to expand natural gas to rural communities, which will enable them to use less or get off electricity, which is causing rates to go up because they're bound by that. They don't have the benefit of natural gas.

We have a program coming on stream for a loan program. We also have a grant program. The rural wardens love this program. They know it's going to help their communities.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Minister of Energy. Last week I saw a slide. It was meant for potential Hydro One investors. It said, "Formal ... agreement ensures the government is investor, not manager." It's another fine example of Liberals saying one thing and doing another. To the people they say, "Don't worry. The government's in control." To the investors they say, "Don't worry. The government isn't in control."

We've been saying it all along: The government is giving up majority control. Obviously, they're losing control of the company. Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit in this House that they will have no control over Hydro One as prices skyrocket and more seniors and other folks have to choose between heating and eating?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, speaking of saying one thing and doing another, I'd like to remind the member that during the 2014 election, both he and his party campaigned on a platform of "opening both Hydro One and OPG to investment.... That initial sale could later be followed by a public offering of shares to both institutional and retail investors.

"Selling part of these two provincial assets will free up money to pay down debt" and customer "prices would continue to be" protected "by the Ontario Energy Board."

The PC energy policy white paper is the latest and only policy on energy that the PC Party has released.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The new leader of the PC Party, Mr. Speaker, has not disavowed that particular policy, which his previous leader had adopted. So they are supportive of expanding the public ownership of Hydro One.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: I would like the minister to actually answer the question: Who will have control of Hydro One when this is all over? Because on June 5, a headline in the Oakville Beaver read: "Government Will Still Control Hydro One After Privatization, Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli tells Oakville audience."

Then on October 9, in the Canadian Press, "The Liberals insist the government will maintain control of Hydro One."

Despite that not being possible, as the government is giving up majority control, we fast-forward and the government is admitting to Bay Street that they're simply just another investor. So which is it, Mr. Speaker? What is it going to be? Is the government going to have control or is the government just another investor looking to maximize profits through increased hydro rates for its customers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member knows that, by law, the largest single shareholder in Hydro One will be the government of Ontario. The preliminary prospectus, which he has a copy of, outlines a legally binding governance agreement that serves both the public interest and the interests of investors. The agreement details the relationship between the government and Hydro One, confirming the government's rights as the principal shareholder but not allowing Hydro One to be free to operate without political interference in its operations. Led by the board and new management team, the company has committed to focus on improved performance.

The reality is, no other shareholder will be able to have more than 10%. There will be broad sale at the retail level to broaden ownership. With a combination of our rights in appointing the board plus all these other factors, we're confident that the public interest will be protected.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: The government will have 40% control. Everyone else will have 60% control of Hydro One. This Liberal government is clearly no longer in it for the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: Hydro One is a monopoly controlling 97% of transmission lines in Ontario. The people in Ontario don't have a choice to get their power anywhere else. It's the only electricity highway in the province, and the government is giving that away. That's why this is a bad deal and that's why we oppose it. The government isn't giving people choice, but instead is giving them higher hydro bills with no way out. The loss of majority control means this government won't be able to stop skyrocketing prices and won't have a say in the expansion of transmission lines.

Why won't the minister stand up for Ontarians, tell the truth and admit they're giving up control of the company?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to start by saying that Hydro One distribution represents 24% of the distribution in the province of Ontario. Certainly in distribution, it's not in a monopoly situation.

And again, if he will want to consult any corporate lawyer, he will know that where you have sales of shares broadly to the public, like the banks, no more than 10% can be owned by one shareholder. There is a certain reality there that enables the public interest to be protected. Also, the Ontario Securities Commission has very, very strict rules on transparency, including transparency on salaries, quarterly reporting and audited statements. There's a lot more there than he's prepared to admit in terms of where Hydro One sits with respect to control.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I also want to begin by congratulating Prime Minister-elect Justin Trudeau, thanking outgoing Prime Minister Stephen Harper for his years of service, and thanking Thomas Mulcair, the leader of the federal New Democrats, as well as New Democrat candidates and volunteers—in fact, candidates and volunteers from all parties—for their participation in the federal election from coast to coast.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The first tranche of the Premier's sell-off of Hydro One shares was supposed to raise for the government \$2.25 billion. Now we've learned that it's only expected to return about \$1.7 billion. That's more than half a billion dollars short, a 25% loss for the people of Ontario before a single share has been sold. This bad deal is getting worse by the day.

Will this Premier admit that it is a bad deal and stop her unnecessary sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to acknowledge that last night was a very exciting night in this country, and the Blue Jays won.

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Exactly. How could nobody mention the Blue Jays?

I want to thank every person who went out to vote. I want to thank all the volunteers from all the parties, and all of the leaders—and their families—who put their names on a ballot and sacrificed so much. It is such a wonderful process. We're blessed to live in this country. Congratulations to all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On the issues before us, they are related to the issues that have been talked about in this federal election. We must make investments in infrastructure. We must invest in the roads and the bridges and the transit that we know are going to allow us to thrive as a province and as a country. The broadening of the ownership of Hydro One is part of that process.

The leader of the third party knows full well that this is just the first step, that the price has not landed. What

she also knows is that we must invest now to create jobs now and to create prosperity in the future.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier's sell-off of Hydro One continues down the path that it is currently on, she could come up \$2 billion short on the sell-off that was always a bad deal for Ontarians.

The people of Ontario have watched over and over again as the Liberals have handed billions of dollars away to their friends. Now this Premier expects them to simply accept that she's going to sell off our most important, our most treasured public asset for a fraction of what it is worth.

Will this Premier start behaving responsibly, acknowledge that this is a mistake and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we are going to make the investments in infrastructure in this province that are necessary for jobs now and for future prosperity. We ran on that, we are implementing that plan, and part of that plan was to leverage current assets in order to invest in the assets that we need for the 21st century.

The leader of the third party knows that the broadening of ownership of Hydro One has many steps. This is just the first step in that process. She also knows that the final price has not yet been set. We are on track to realize that \$9 billion and we are going to make those investments in infrastructure that we know are so critical.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: At every turn and at every opportunity, this Liberal government has been creative with their numbers to the people of Ontario, from the gas plants to Ornge to eHealth to the sell-off of Hydro One. Now this Premier is poised to sell off Hydro One for likely over \$2 billion less than what the government said it was worth, and we all know many, many people have weighed in to say that the government's estimates are seriously lowballed.

This is a bad deal, Speaker, and it keeps getting worse. Will this Premier stop this wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: As we know, it's still under review. The prospectus is going before the public. We haven't finalized what that price will be. We recognize that in the prospectus, a billion dollars was actually put out through a dividend which goes to consolidated revenue for the people of Ontario and the ratepayers.

What's really important to note is we are broadening ownership. We're not selling 100% of this corporation, only 15% as a first tranche. We recognize that it's going to be controlled by the OEB when it comes to protecting consumers and ratepayers for pricing. But more importantly, unlike what has happened in the past, we're reinvesting dollar for dollar into infrastructure, into other assets for making Ontario competitive and more prosperous in the future.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier has said many times that the government will somehow maintain de facto control over our hydro system. But the sales pitch that the Premier is flogging to investors is saying something quite different. The company “will operate with an independent board and autonomous decision-making.”

The Premier is saying one thing to investors and she’s saying something completely different to Ontarians. Will this Premier admit that the government will not have control over Hydro One, de facto or otherwise?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, because that’s not true. The fact is that there is a balance that has to be reached, and that balance is that we need to broaden the ownership of Hydro One to make it a better-run company, to leverage that asset in order to invest in the infrastructure that we know we need now and in the future.

At the same time, we need to put the protections in place that were not put in place, for example, in the sell-off of the 407, protections that would guarantee that for major decisions, the people of Ontario would make those decisions, because there would need to be two thirds of the board that would agree. With 40% ownership of the board, that would require that the people of Ontario have a say. We retain control of the removal of the board, the removal of the CEO.

Those protections are in place. At the same time, we are leveraging this asset to make the investments we know we need to make.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians are worried about what losing control of their public hydro will mean for reliability and for already soaring electricity rates.

While the Premier is telling Ontarians that the government will retain control, her sell-off road show to investors proudly proclaims that the formal governance agreement “ensures [the] government is [an] investor, not a manager.”

Will this Premier admit that investor profit will be the prime motivator in Hydro One and that she has no plan to exert any public policy control over Ontario’s hydro utility, just like she’s promising to the investors?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the leader of the third party is saying is just not accurate. The very protections that we have put in place are to guarantee that the 40% ownership that will be retained by the people of Ontario is able to exert some control. But it’s true, the company needs to be run better. There need to be improvements and those improvements will be made.

Most importantly, we’ve said clearly to the people of Ontario that we were going to make investments in roads, bridges and transit in order to be able to move goods more efficiently, to move people, to improve people’s quality of life. That is what we are doing. By leveraging this asset, we are going to be able to invest in the assets—all of those pieces of infrastructure that we know

we need for now in order to create jobs but also in the future and for our economic prosperity.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The loss of control over Hydro One is particularly troubling to Ontarians since this Premier has stripped Hydro One of all independent oversight. Ontarians have endured a quadrupling of their energy rates under this Liberal government, and the Liberals just announced that the rates in fact are going to increase by more than \$100 a year. It is obvious that shareholder return on investment is more important than controlling rates for families and businesses. It is obvious that this deal is a bad deal all the way around.

The Premier has a chance to do the right thing. Will she stop the unnecessary sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It’s very important that we understand how critical the investments are that we need to make. I truly believe that one of the reasons we have the new Prime Minister we have in this country is that he understands investment. He understands that if you believe in infrastructure and you’re going to invest in it, you have to have a way to pay for it. That is not what the leader of the third party believes.

We’ve made a very tough decision. We’ve made a very tough decision on Hydro One. We’ve put protections in place. We’ve made sure the big decisions require two thirds of the board and that the people of Ontario retain 40%. But we are going to move forward, and now we’re going to move forward in partnership with a federal government that shares the same value system.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, no. The member from Windsor–Tecumseh, come to order, please.

New question?

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Finance. When the Liberals took office in 2003, revenues in Ontario were just over \$66 billion. Today, revenues are \$124 billion but, sadly, expenses are \$132 billion. It’s clear we don’t have a revenue problem in Ontario; we have a spending problem.

On W5 last week, the Treasury Board president emphatically announced, “We’re out of money.” She then stated, “We have to do everything we can to raise revenues.”

Speaker, my question for the minister is simple: Which taxes are you going to raise this time?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Ontario’s GDP has now increased 14.4% from the recession low and is now 8.9% higher than it was during that time, so we have grown our economy. We’re continuing to do what’s necessary to provide greater prosperity for the people of Ontario. We are being disciplined and determined in ensuring that we control our program spending. As a result, year over year we’ve exceeded our targets and we’ve done what’s necessary to bring down our deficit, as we said we would,

and we'll go to zero by 2017-18, ensuring that we invest in our economy while protecting those programs that are essential to the people of Ontario: health care, education and social programs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: It's alarming to hear the head of our treasury announce to the entire country, "We're out of money," and then, last week, the minister reported meager economic growth in Ontario; in fact, he showed we're stagnating. He reported annualized growth of only half of what was forecast in his spring budget.

Because the Liberals simply cannot control their spending, they will come up short by hundreds of millions of dollars. This happened last year, too—they came back with cap in hand for a further \$500 million—but this time, they've already blown through their contingency budget.

So again, Speaker, I ask the minister: Which taxes are you going to raise this year?

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Hon. Charles Sousa: President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Good morning. I am delighted to actually give the quote in full. Actually, the documentary did carry the quote in full, and this is a quote that I am fond of using. A physicist named Ernest Rutherford, a New Zealand physicist, had a project, and here's what he said. He assembled his crowd together when they hit a financial problem. He said, "Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now it is time to think." Speaker, that is exactly what we're doing at the Treasury Board. We are thinking through all of our government expenditures.

You are the party that is standing up, looking to raise compensation for—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You were the party that rejected our plans to reduce the cost of generic drugs. We were able to bring down the cost of—

Mr. John Yakabuski: You were the thinking party that got us into this mess. Don't think any more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We were able to bring down the cost of drugs by 50%, and you said, "No, don't do that. Keep those drugs as high as you can." You even had pharmacists running, one of whom got elected—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —on the platform of raising—

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier: The government is promising Bay Street high cash

dividends for investors who buy Hydro One stock, but these dividends are paid for by electricity consumers, and their bills are going up.

The latest government price increase last week will mean that a typical household will pay more than \$120 extra per year for electricity, starting this winter, than last winter. Peak hour rates will be 25% higher this winter than they were the last.

Why is the government promoting rising electricity rates to Bay Street as a main selling point of Hydro One instead of keeping these rates affordable for Ontarians?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member doesn't seem to be able to recall that there are three very, very significant controls over the electricity sector, including Hydro One, Toronto Hydro and all the others.

Number one, the Ontario Energy Board controls rates. They have the ultimate control of how to set rates, and the rates have to be justified by the costs from all of these different agencies.

The Ontario Securities Commission requires audited financial statements four times a year. They require disclosure of salaries to senior officials. They watch, like a hawk, all of the operations to make sure that they're properly done and done responsibly.

The IESO is responsible for planning the system. We have expanded their authority to make sure that they can create the infrastructure that's required in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, there's tremendous control—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Peak hour electricity rates will be 25% higher this winter than they were last winter—a 25% increase in just one year. These are the regulated rates approved by the Ontario Energy Board.

The minister says the OEB will keep rates affordable once Hydro One is privatized. He just talked about how they'll be controlled. If the OEB can't keep rates affordable now, how will it keep rates affordable once Hydro One is privatized, especially when the government is promoting rising Hydro One profits to Bay Street investors as a key selling point? How?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Encouraging consumers to shift to off-peak consumption helps reduce the need for costly new peaking generation, which would significantly drive rates up. The Auditor General, whose appointment the NDP and the PCs both supported, said that the on-peak-to-off-peak ratio needed to be broadened to further incent conservation. The former Environmental Commissioner, also supported by both the NDP and PCs, called for the very same thing, stating that a bigger differential between off-peak and on-peak would help Ontarians conserve electricity. Ontarians told the OEB that they want electricity pricing to provide greater incentives to conserve.

Giving customers incentives and opportunities to manage their bills by shifting time of electricity use is a key objective of the OEB's price plan, following the direction

from the Auditor General and the Environmental Commissioner.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Last week, I was pleased to join the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport at the first-ever cultural strategy consultation, in my riding of Barrie.

The MacLaren Art Centre is a heritage building in Barrie that has been transformed into a dynamic cultural hub. We were joined by Nova Bhattacharya, a choreographer and dancer; Peter Lynch, a filmmaker and documentarian; and over 100 members of the community from all walks of life, ethnicities, ages and backgrounds to discuss what culture means to us. It was an energetic and exciting night, with many fantastic conversations and ideas.

Minister, can you provide us with some detail about the cultural strategy and the process of the sessions?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just want to start by saying how proud I was to join the MPP from Barrie in her town. It was an incredible event and there was a lot of excitement, and a great conversation took place.

Our government is committed to this effort because we believe that art and culture are important to the quality of life here in the province of Ontario. We also believe that it's an indicator of well-being and enhances our sense of place. It helps shape and enrich our lives and communities, not to mention that it is a huge economic driver for the province at nearly 4% of our GDP. It represents \$22 billion in our economy and employs over 280,000 people.

We also know that so much has changed in the last decade. There's a change in the fiscal situation and the demographics—and the digital changes within the sector. We want to take creativity and innovation and leverage it so we can continue to grow our knowledge-based economy here in the province of Ontario. Most importantly, we want a strategy that reflects the needs of Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister. I'm proud of the successes our government continues to make in the area of arts and culture.

The arts can have a profound effect on our lives. As an educator, I know that for children and youth, participating in the arts can lead to better social skills, better grades at school and lower dropout rates—simply a better start in life. For seniors, participating in the arts can lead to better health and well-being. Arts and culture strengthen the economy, attracting people to live in, visit and spend money in our communities. Creativity plays an important role in innovation, which in turn plays a pivotal role in economic development.

Minister, can you inform the members of this House how they and their constituents can take part in the culture strategy?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, I want to thank the MPP from Barrie.

We're hosting 11 town halls throughout the province, from Sudbury and Thunder Bay in the north to Ottawa and Kingston in the east and London and Windsor in the southwest. The next cultural strategy will be held this Thursday, October 22, in the beautiful town of Thunder Bay.

Town halls are just one way that people can voice their opinions. I encourage everyone to join the live conversation online at ontario.ca/culturetalks.

Another forum for people to have their say and to talk about culture and what it means to them is to join the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #ONculture.

It's important, and we believe this is an opportunity for Ontarians right across the province to talk about what culture means to them. We know that by maximizing our resources and building culture and art here in the province of Ontario, we're building Ontario up.

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Finance: We know this government is aware of the immediate threat to employees and retirees at US Steel Canada, specifically to their pensions and benefits.

This government has announced a \$3-million transitional health benefit fund. However, across Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton and Niagara, we now have 20,000 vulnerable retirees who are struggling with the grim reality that they were asked to take pensions and pension increases in place of wage increases.

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Minister, apart from supporting US Steel Canada's restructuring process, and apart from the transition fund, my question is, what specifically will this government be offering to pensioners at US Steel Canada?

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's an appropriate question, and I appreciate the concern the member opposite has, as do all of us, for the families who are affected by the proceedings of the US parent and the bankruptcy that has taken place.

We have stood by the retirees and the workers throughout this process, recognizing how important it is to them to ensure that they're protected after this very unfortunate situation. It's why we continue to negotiate on their behalf, it's why we've put forward a transition for the next six months to protect those families, and it is why we're demanding that the federal government release the agreement they made with the US parent that was done in secret, which has serious implications for these families. We would like to know what has taken place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: We also know the assets of US Steel Canada are now in play. The land, plant and equipment are now on the market for new bidders. In addition to the valuable workers, there are valuable assets: the coke oven, the hot strip mill, the galvanizing line, and very large acreages at both Hamilton and Lake Erie Works.

I can attest that at Lake Erie Works, they truly have put their shoulder to the wheel. They're vigorously pursuing new orders for steel, and they're rooting out waste and inefficiency.

Will the minister explain to this House just what the government's plans are and the action steps that are being actively pursued in conjunction with your government's strategy to support Ontario's steel industry, and more specifically to support the restructuring of US Steel Canada?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the direction that the member is taking. What he's suggesting, and I think all of us should appreciate, is that we want to make certain that US Steel Canada remains a going concern. That's at risk right now because of the actions taken by an agreement made by the federal government that has yet to be released, and by the actions of the US parent that are stripping away the very assets and value from the Canadian operations, including Lake Erie Works.

We will continue to work to find ways to protect the industry. It is an essential industry in the automotive sector, and we know we have only a few left, including one in Sault Ste. Marie, all of which provide support to this critical sector and this industry.

We will work and continue to work alongside the member, as well, to find ways to foster means to make US Steel Canada a going concern or a legible—

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

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians pay more, by far, for auto insurance than anywhere else in the country.

This government promised that they would reduce auto insurance rates by 15% within two years. That was over two years ago.

A recent York University business school study of insurance rates found that over the same two years, Ontarians were overbilled for their auto insurance to the tune of \$1.5 billion. That's outrageous.

Mr. Speaker, will this government commit today to reduce auto insurance rates by 15%?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: This government has been committed to finding ways to reduce the cost of claims and ultimately reduce the premiums of those claims. It was the member opposite and his party who actually delayed the ability for us to provide for those programs and legislation to enable those reductions. That is taking place, and we'll continue to do what's necessary to support a very sustainable, lower-cost industry.

It's not about reducing rates at one point in time, but being able to enable the industry to have lower costs on an ongoing basis.

We have reduced rates substantively. We have to do better, and as a result of recent legislation we put forward, it's starting to happen, and we continue to fight for those consumers and for our ratepayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, the fact is, this government isn't anywhere near their stated commitment of a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates for consumers. The minister responsible has gone from promising to reduce the rates by 15% in two years to no longer committing to a time line. That's because this government is placing too much emphasis on reducing costs for the insurance companies today, while its wait-and-see approach for Ontario leaves people struggling to keep their cars on the road.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit today to reducing outrageous auto insurance rates for all Ontarians by 15% immediately? You have a majority government. You could do it right away.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Just last week, I announced the ability to reduce rates by an additional 5% to 10% through installing winter tires, for example; we also took steps to reduce dispute resolutions; we took steps to protect consumers with respect to the amount of interest payments that they have on monthly costs, all of which enables consumers to pay less and enables those insurance companies to charge less.

I also encourage the member opposite to tell his constituents and others that it is a competitive industry—well over 100 companies offering insurance—and you have to give them an opportunity to shop around because, when they do, they'll be able to find even greater reductions because some insurance companies have reduced their rates by 10% and 15% already; some have not. I encourage them to shop around and ensure they get the best rates they can. In the meantime, we will continue to find ways to reduce those costs by the programs that we put in place, including the elimination of storage costs.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. In the 2014 election, Ontarians voted for a government that would create a business climate that encourages companies of all sizes to grow and create jobs, something that's very important to my community of Cambridge and, indeed, Waterloo region.

I understand that this has been an important priority in various ministries. Strategic planning to increase competitiveness in Ontario helped make our province the number one North American jurisdiction for direct foreign investment in 2015. While it's an important achievement, I know that our government continues to work on streamlining business laws, ensuring that they're responsive to changing priorities and supportive of a prosperous economy.

Can the minister please speak to the work that his ministry has been doing to ensure Ontario is open for business?

Hon. David Oraziotti: I just want to take a quick moment to congratulate Terry Sheehan, our new federal MP in Sault Ste. Marie.

I want to thank the member from Cambridge for asking a question on this important issue and for her advocacy. In our 2015 budget, we committed to strengthening opportunities for business in Ontario. Ontario has over a million active businesses with over 60,000 new businesses registering each and every year.

In order to help these businesses grow and create jobs, our government is undertaking a comprehensive review of corporate and commercial statutes. Through this review, the first of its kind in 10 years, we are exploring innovative business structures to solidify Ontario's position as a jurisdiction of choice for new businesses, including social entrepreneurs who are driving innovation and competing to attract investment globally.

As part of this process, we're going to be implementing changes that will modernize governance structures that will make it more attractive to do business in Ontario and changes that will streamline reporting requirements so businesses will want to come to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the minister for his response and the commitment that his ministry has made to modernizing Ontario's business law.

This is an important component of our government's plan to build Ontario up. I know that the minister has been personally engaged with provincial and territorial counterparts on ways to reduce burdens on the many businesses that call our province home. Many businesses have asked for the opportunity to offer feedback to ensure business law keeps up with the evolving trends and technology. I understand that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, as part of our Open Government commitment, has made sure that expert and public feedback would influence its business law modernization.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please speak to the consultations and work with the experts that his ministry has conducted to help make Ontario a dynamic business climate?

Hon. David Oraziotti: Again, to the member from Cambridge, thank you for the supplementary question. I'm pleased to report that our government's work on this initiative has effectively utilized expert recommendations.

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This past spring, in fact, an expert stakeholder panel met for several months to consider priorities that would support a dynamic business climate in Ontario and solidify Ontario's position as a jurisdiction of choice for businesses. The panel's report to government was posted on the regulatory registry this September, and the feedback we receive will provide an important impact to our review.

I want to thank my parliamentary assistant, Chris Ballard, the MPP for Newmarket–Aurora, for his work on this initiative—

Applause.

Hon. David Oraziotti: —absolutely—and for his work with our new advisory council. The council's

creation will follow up on the recommendations made by our stakeholder panel, ensuring that any changes are responsive to the business priorities and support a prosperous economy in Ontario.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. I have received reports of falling debris from industrial wind turbines in the municipality of Bluewater. Farmers harvesting their crops were warned to stay a minimum of 300 metres away from these turbines.

According to a CKNX 920 report, Bluewater council has asked staff to look into reports that parts of wind turbines are falling off the blades. Mayor Tyler Hessel reported that a few residents have told their councillors that they've been told by the wind energy company officials not to take crops off near the turbines until they notify the company, so they can slow down the turbines.

Speaker, will the minister order an immediate and thorough safety inspection by an impartial third party of industrial wind turbines in Ontario and commit to halting any turbines deemed unsafe?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Huron–Bruce for her question and her vigilance, because we all take public safety in any piece of public infrastructure very seriously. I want to thank you for that. I will also meet with her at her convenience to review this particular file and ensure that we are fully enforcing our safety standards and laws.

Wind turbines are just about the safest technology we have out there, certainly compared to coal plants, which for seniors, for kids, asthma, air quality issues—there are challenges with every technology, from transmission lines to nuclear. The enemy of good is perfect.

But we face a climate crisis, and the Minister of Energy and I and the Premier are working very hard to deliver safe, affordable, clean energy to Ontario. That continues to be our priority.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the minister: This is a matter of safety today, and we're talking about potential harmful direct impacts that we've worried about for years. We all know the Liberal green energy scheme has been a complete failure, contributing to yet another electricity rate increase as of November 1, and now industrial wind turbines are reported to be literally falling apart.

Why won't the minister commit today to an immediate and thorough safety audit of industrial wind turbines in Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we look very carefully at every single piece of infrastructure, every industrial site. We have strong inspections. I have been personally in the member's riding this summer, visiting with farmers and visiting with community leaders, listening to concerns. I think that's actively our responsibility

as members of this assembly, to get out of our own constituencies and listen to Ontarians.

This is an issue of concern, but to generalize it and suggest this is a problem with a particular technology is, I think, premature. We take these things seriously. I will work with the member opposite because I share her concern for public safety, and I will be open in sharing the results of any inspections with her.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. In April 2014, the government arbitrarily shortened the length of the Partner Assault Response Program, the only government program for men who abuse, in order to cram through an additional 2,200 offenders. Across the province, violence-against-women agencies and PAR providers sounded the alarm. Hiatus House in Windsor and WomanACT in Toronto are no longer delivering PAR because they believe the changes are putting women at risk. Everyone, except the government, understands that there is a crisis in the design and delivery of PAR programs.

Speaker, why is the Premier refusing to listen to experts and front-line agencies who are pleading for a halt to these changes and for meaningful consultation on the review of PAR?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member for her question, but, like I've said many times in this House, we have not reduced the amount in the budget—on the contrary. There was a review that was done because some areas were very, very busy and did not have enough money to cover the program. So there was a review done, and we reviewed the program and redirected the money where it should be.

Moreover, we looked at the number of sessions that were provided. Yes, there was a waiting list. By reducing—further to consultation with the experts—by two sessions, we were able to eliminate the waiting list. We always review, and we work with the experts and adjust accordingly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Putting more offenders through on the same budget represents a cut.

Speaker, the Premier knows that you can't make good policy without good data, yet WomanACT was instructed to stop collecting data on PAR, perhaps because their data was showing that the new 12-week model was creating a revolving door and compromising the program's effectiveness.

Will the Premier commit to collecting data from all PAR programs in Ontario and to working with qualified researchers to analyze the data against the evidence of what works from similar programs in other jurisdictions?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we work with the experts. We look at what is done, what is working, what is not working, and we change the program accordingly, like I said.

Last year, we changed the format of the PAR Program to reduce wait times. I said that in answering the first question. The new 12-session model allows the program to serve an additional 2,200 offenders per year, which is an increase in the program capacity of more than 22%. This means that offenders can enter the program more quickly and victims will have easier access to support services. So these changes do not impact the objective of the program. Offenders will continue to be held accountable to an appropriate and relevant program curriculum.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, thanks for allowing some latitude. I want to take the opportunity to congratulate Kim Rudd, the newly elected MP for Northumberland–Peterborough South, and Neil Ellis, the new MP for the Bay of Quinte riding.

My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, we know that investments in infrastructure across our province are key to economic growth. Besides playing a big part in our quality of life, investing in infrastructure is one of the most important things we can do to jump-start our economy in the short term and improve our productivity and competitiveness in the longer term. Whether we are building highways in Northumberland–Quinte West or public transit in downtown Toronto, we all depend on high-quality infrastructure to keep our communities moving forward. Infrastructure challenges must be addressed in every corner of the province. People need their highways widened and their bridges secured. Rural and small-town Ontario cannot be left behind by investments in our big cities.

Minister, could you please inform this House on what this government is doing to enhance rural infrastructure?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I would like to take this opportunity to welcome a new federal member of Parliament in the riding of Peterborough–Kawartha, Maryam Monsef, who was victorious last night.

I also want to thank my good friend and colleague the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for the question. Prior to his arrival here in 2003, the member from Northumberland–Quinte West was a very distinguished mayor of Brighton, Ontario. I remember, because I was in municipal politics those days, that the mayor of Brighton was a champion for additional infrastructure investment, not only in his community but certainly in eastern Ontario.

We do know, through our \$100-million Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, where we provide \$50 million through an application-based process and \$50 million through a formula allocation basis, that it's something that our rural municipality leaders have been asking for, and, Mr. Speaker, we have delivered on that commitment.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you to the minister for that update. Minister, I'm glad to hear, and I know my

constituents in the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West will also be happy, that this government takes the needs of our small town, rural and northern communities seriously. This fund delivers on some long-standing municipal needs by offering permanent, predictable formula allocations that will help address local priorities. By consulting with municipal leaders in these investments, it is clear that our government believes in working collaboratively with other levels of government to ensure we do what’s best for the province.

There’s always more we can do. Our small, rural and northern communities need a full range of public infrastructure supports, from roads and bridges and water supply networks to green energy and broadband connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister inform the House of further action that has been taken to support infrastructure development outside of the GTHA?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member for his supplementary question. Both the member from Northumberland–Quinte West and I were in municipal politics in the late 1990s, and that was a period of time when we had that famous Who Does What committee. In fact, we renamed that committee the “who got done in” committee. Of course, in eastern Ontario, 43% of all the roads and bridges were downloaded in our part of the province. Through this government, since 2003, through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and the Small Communities Fund, gradually we’re digging out of that ditch. The reason we’re digging out of that ditch is the leadership from the member for Northumberland–Quinte West. We will keep moving together to invest in infrastructure in Ontario, because that builds a dynamic private sector economy.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Attorney General. Speaker, we have approximately 40 subordinate legal tribunals which were created to provide low-cost, expeditious access to justice for people. The minister, as the chief law officer of the crown, is responsible for the administration of justice in our province. Senior administrators in the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services have long recognized the failings of the safety, licensing appeals and standards tribunals, or SLASTO for short, in meeting these objectives, and even gone so far as to admitting that the system is broken and dissuades people from seeking remedies and justice.

Speaker, what guidance, advice and actions has the Attorney General undertaken to rectify and remedy the failings of the SLASTO tribunals in general, and specifically the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I’ll say this: I disagree with the member from the opposite party, because we have very professional individuals working on these tribunals and we have experts as the chairs of the tribunals. This individual who is in charge of the tribunal is a very experienced person.

We always review the tribunal. A few years ago, we started clustering different tribunals so as to reduce costs and to improve the experience and the expertise of the members and to accelerate the cases to be heard. When there are more people that are cognizant of these clustering tribunals, it works better. So I disagree with the member.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Not surprisingly, the Attorney General disagrees with me, but I have a document here which I’ll share. In it is a quote from Frank Denton, assistant deputy minister of government and consumer services, in regard to homeowners’ dissatisfaction and difficulties in taking action at the LAT: “A less litigious and adversarial process would ... address concerns of homeowners” who “are dissuaded from pursuing LAT appeals” because the process is not transparent, is complicated, time-consuming and unbalanced. Speaker, that quote is from October 2014 and the problems still persist today.

When will the Attorney General take the administration of justice seriously and finally modernize the broken and dysfunctional tribunal system in this province?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I take my job very seriously.

First of all, let’s say this: I don’t direct the members of tribunals on how to do their work. There is a chair of these tribunals and they are independent.

On the administrative side, there is always a way to improve the quality of the work and also the timeliness to make a decision. So it’s important for us to make sure that we will continue to improve the situation. But if there is a special situation, I will be willing to forward the concern to the chair of the tribunal.

Thank you for bringing that to my attention. I will make sure that I’ll get back to my colleague on the other side.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance concerning US Steel Canada. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today in the east members’ gallery, we have from Stoney Creek, in the 38th Parliament, Jennifer Mossop. Thank you for joining us today.

A point of order? The deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Arriving during question period was Mr. Rick Firth, executive director, Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, in the members’ gallery.

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

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I have about 30 people here today. I'll just introduce perhaps the first 15 or so. They're here with the Save Ojibway group: Nancy Pancheshan is here, along with John Barnett, Renée Trepanier, Stephanie Renaud, Chantel Trudelle, Tracy Rogers, Claire McAllister, Cathy Dodich, Phil Beaudoin, Cheryl Landry, Lorena Shepley, Katie Albert, Judy Allingham, Ronald Pritchard, Krista Zdyb, Carol Easton and Denis Simpson.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introduction of guests? The other 15, please: the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to welcome Sarah Wilkinson, Leonard Wilkinson Misquitta, Gabrielle Wilkinson Misquitta, Kathy Owen, Egemen Aktas, Michelle Mainwaring, Noah Mainwaring, Nancy Maggio, Noah Maggio, Teejai Travis, Daniel Nardone, Kelly Labranche, Laura Martindale, Cassandra Robinson, Mick Dowson, Marie Dowson, Peter Marvel and Mel Diotte. Thank you for joining us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING WEEK

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of Patrick Brown and the PC caucus in recognition of Community Health and Wellbeing Week. During this week, Ontario's 109 community health centres, aboriginal health access centres, community-governed family health teams and nurse practitioner-led clinics are holding special events across the province. The week's events are coordinated by the provincial association: the Association of Ontario Health Centres. The theme this week is "Community Health and Wellbeing: Shift the Conversation," creating a new kind of dialogue about health and health care.

As things stand now, far too many Ontarians experience preventable illnesses because our fragmented health care system remains poorly prepared to address the most important determinants of good health: access to good nutrition, housing, social supports, employment, income and education. This province needs to do a much better job of responding to these determinants of health.

During Community Health and Wellbeing Week, the focus is on this very important principle: To improve health and well-being, we need to promote community vitality and people's sense of belonging to that community. Research tells us that when people live in caring and connected communities that make them feel like they belong, they are more likely to be healthy. So in community health centres, in addition to doctors and nurses who provide medical services, there are health promoters and community development workers who run

initiatives designed to create more connected and caring communities for everyone to feel more valued and accepted.

There are two excellent examples of community health centres in my riding: the Central CHC in St. Thomas and the West Elgin Community Health Centre.

Community health centres were introduced by the PC Party 40 years ago when John Robarts was Premier and, in 1982, under the leadership of Bill Davis and Health Minister Larry Grossman, they transitioned from pilot projects into the mainstream health system.

Our party is very pleased to be joining community health centres and other members of the Association of Ontario Health Centres in celebrating Community Health and Wellbeing Week. Their efforts promoting community vitality and a sense of belonging are vital to ensure the best possible health and well-being for everybody living in Ontario.

PEGGY NASH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my honour today to rise and talk about a phenomenal woman. Her name is Peggy Nash. She was the MP for Parkdale–High Park for over 10 years. This was a woman who was Buzz Hargrove's EA when she started out, a co-founder of Equal Voice across Canada and winner of many awards, including the YWCA's woman of the year award, which we celebrated in downtown Toronto.

She's actually the woman who mentored me, who got me into politics, who asked me if I would consider running for the New Democratic Party. A phenomenal worker, a phenomenal activist—tireless in her advocacy for all those who needed her most. The founder of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet, for example.

Because Peggy is such a classy woman, she would want me to thank all of her campaign staff, her campaign manager, Jill Marzetti, and all of the volunteers, of which there were hundreds in our riding. Finally, she would want us to congratulate Arif Virani, who did win and is our new MP.

Peggy, we love you. Whatever you decide to do in your next career, we still love you. Thank you so much for everything you gave and everything you did for Parkdale–High Park.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Yesterday, Canadians across the country, including myself and my wife, had the opportunity to go to the polls and exercise our democratic right. They had the opportunity to vote for a person who would best represent their communities and values in Ottawa and support investments in health care, infrastructure and our economy—

Hon. Jeff Leal: And who is it?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'll get there in a minute—as well as other important issues, such as affordable housing, environmental protection and retirement savings.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the very first elected member of Parliament for the new riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South, Kim Rudd, and the very first member of Parliament elected for the Bay of Quinte riding, Mr. Neil Ellis.

As an active volunteer with her community, MP-elect Rudd understands the value these kinds of partnerships and investments mean to our communities and how they will affect all the constituents.

As a former mayor of Belleville, MP Ellis is well aware of the importance of co-operation with different levels of government. This is crucial for the success of the Northumberland–Quinte West region, for the province of Ontario and for our great country.

I'm excited to be able to sit down with my federal counterparts in the coming weeks and months to discuss issues that help build Ontario up. It takes tremendous courage for anyone to make the decision to put their name forward and run in an election. We had many local candidates who stood up for the constituents in Northumberland–Quinte West with honour and pride. I would like to thank them all for taking that on.

NAVRATRI

Mr. Steve Clark: Beginning on October 13 this year, people of Hindu faith across Ontario have been observing Navratri. Navratri is a festival dedicated to the Hindu deity Durga. A common form of celebration during this festival is participating in the Indian dance called Garba.

Over the past few weeks, Hindu communities from different parts of the province have been hosting Garba parties. I had the great pleasure of attending a few Garba parties with our leader, Patrick Brown, in Brampton and Vaughan recently. We took part in the festivities, and we actually learned a few new moves, with thousands of Hindu Ontarians.

The kindness and welcoming nature of our Hindu friends was a true representation of what it means to be Canadian. It is at times such as Navratri that we, as Ontarians, have an opportunity to learn more about the different cultures that contribute to this great province.

I encourage all Ontarians to take time to enjoy the diversity of our population. We're very privileged to live in a province and a great country where we can share the best of many cultures and learn about many different religions, such as the Hindu religion.

The Hindu community in Ontario, consisting of almost 400,000 people, is vital to the economic, social and cultural vibrancy of this province. On behalf of Patrick Brown and the official opposition, I wish all Hindus across Ontario a joyous Navratri, and we look forward to celebrating Diwali with all of you in November.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last Friday I had the pleasure of addressing the Women of the Year Awards in Stratford, hosted by Optimism Place, a women's shelter. In the

speech I talked about the importance of women entering the political arena so that the ever-present power imbalance between men and women might finally be addressed.

Progressive legislation and policy needs to be inclusive of all voices. Women rarely see themselves or hear their voices and concerns in political debate. Certainly the issue of violence against women is as current an issue as it always was and always will be until a culture of acceptance is addressed head-on.

While the political pundits and pollsters will analyze the federal election from last night, of the 338 elected, only 88 will be women—26% women—up only one percentage point from the last Parliament. While many voters may have chosen dramatic change in Canada's political landscape last night, one thing remained virtually unchanged: the proportion of women who will serve in the federal Parliament.

A highlight for me, though, was that last night, I drove Heather to the poll. It was her first time voting. She was in her sixties, and she was intimidated by the experience but was so proud to cast a vote for the first time. It provided a good bookend to the day, as I had taken my daughter, Claire, to vote as part of the Equal Voice campaign Take a Girl to Vote earlier that day.

1510

We have a lot of work to do, and we will only be able to refer to our country as equal, as progressive, as just, when the government of the day, regardless of the political stripe, is truly reflective of the population, which must include women and must include electoral reform.

DEFIBRILLATION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me pleasure to tell the House today about a great miracle that took place in my riding of Beaches–East York.

Last month, a rugby player with the Balmy Beach Beachers playing at Fletcher's Fields took a hit to the chest and his heart stopped. All his friends knew right away that there was a serious situation because he just collapsed without, in any way, trying to break his fall. Eric Shannon, who was nicknamed "Cotton" because of his soft hands, was clinically dead. The trainer and the medic, Kaylin Perchinig, and two of his teammates—Haydn Gage, who is a trained firefighter, and Conor McCann, who is also training to become a firefighter—ran over and immediately started CPR. They did so for about 10 full minutes.

Meanwhile, someone went out to the field and got a defibrillator. It took three shocks to get his heart going, but they did get it going. A week later, he was released from hospital, fully healthy, as if nothing had happened.

Eric has said that there should be a defibrillator at every single sports field such as Fletcher's, and we agree with him. I raise this to raise awareness so that we do take the time and the effort to ensure that there are defibrillators at all public and private sporting arenas.

I'd also like to raise the fact about the important training that firefighters get in life-saving techniques.

Had it not been for that training, had it not been for the defibrillator, Shannon would not be with us today.

ONTARIO ENVIRONMENT INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I think the amazing part about statements is that you learn what's happening in each other's respective ridings. I appreciated the statement that we just heard from Beaches–East York, and I just want to share with you that there's a foundation called the David Mounsey foundation in our area that raises funds for defibrillators for all arenas and sports fields. So hopefully it extends. That was very good.

Today, I'd also like to, through my statement, welcome the Ontario Environment Industry Association to Queen's Park. ONEIA members are committed to providing market-driven solutions to today's environmental problems using world-class technologies that are both cost-effective and environmentally sound.

Ontario's environment and clean-tech companies are vital to the health of our dynamic economy and provide industry with the tools they need to succeed in world markets. Their innovative solutions help companies produce higher-quality goods with a lower environmental impact, all while reducing their energy costs. Truly, these companies help create win-win situations for everyone involved.

Because of this, Ontario's environmental industry is recognized globally for its innovative approach. This booming sector, comprised of more than 3,000 environmental companies and upwards of 65,000 employees, exports technologies and services approaching \$1 billion in value to every part of the globe. In fact, this industry is so robust that last year, 75% of these particular businesses reported that they would be increasing their employees and hiring this coming year.

I look forward to their reception this evening in the dining room. Everyone's invited.

TURKISH CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'd like to speak for a moment regarding Turkish heritage day but begin by offering congratulations not only to the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, but also to the perpetually re-elected Dr. Kirsty Duncan, the MP-elect for the great riding of Etobicoke North.

Speaker, the history of Turkish people and Turkish-origin people in Canada is almost as old as Canada itself. People from the Ottoman Empire arrived on our shores in the early 20th century and established a life here in Canada.

What may be interesting for my colleagues to learn is that people of Turkish origin are not merely from Turkey but actually from about 15 different other countries, which include Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and even China, Iran and Russia. And there's another group of

people who are establishing themselves here, the Uighurs, who are now basically subsumed within the mainland of China, but were originally part of the Ottoman Empire.

It's a very vibrant community. There are about 50,000-plus and growing, many of whom make their home in Etobicoke North. They have contributed, as you can imagine, at all different levels. The president and vice-chancellor of the University of Waterloo, for example; Canadian figure skaters; and acclaimed actors and comedians all hail from this community.

I'm very proud to support them and look forward to introducing Turkish heritage week subsequently.

HALTON EQUITABLE DRUG STRATEGY

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Last week, I was pleased to represent the Ontario government at HEDS Up 2015, a forum hosted by the Halton Equitable Drug Strategy collaborative. The room was full of people from different walks of life, driven by a collective desire to address the complex issues surrounding drug use and addictions in our community.

This made-in-Halton strategy is focused on a vision of a safer, healthier, well-informed Halton that will work to prevent, reduce and eliminate the stigma and harm from substance abuse. To truly assist people suffering from addiction, to help future generations and to protect our community from the dangers associated with drug use requires a multi-faceted approach. Such an approach is possible through collaboratives like the Halton Equitable Drug Strategy, which is coordinating the efforts and expertise of people and services across our region.

At HEDS Up 2015, we celebrated the presentation of an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of over \$149,000. I'm certain this Trillium grant will assist in our combined efforts to make Ontario and Halton safer and healthier places to live. I am certain, too, that the individuals involved in this wonderful collaborative will add tremendous value.

Mr. Speaker, as you will know, the government of Ontario is currently entering into the second phase of our comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy, and I am proud to note that the goals of the Halton Equitable Drug Strategy are very much aligned with that strategy. By continuing to work together, we can make a real difference in the lives of so many people suffering from addictions, and we can ultimately build stronger, healthier communities.

I congratulate the members of the collaborative and I look forward to working with them in the years ahead.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list draw of October 5, 2015, for private members' public business, such that Mr. Harris assumes ballot item number 18 and Mr. Arnott assumes ballot item number 78.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated October 20, 2015, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

563523 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2015

Mrs. Martow moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr29, An Act to revive 563523 Ontario Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

1064514 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2015

Mrs. Martow moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr30, An Act to revive 1064514 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

MOTIONS

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you'll find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the use of sign-language interpreters in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Agreed.

1520

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I move that on Tuesday, October 20, sign-language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber to interpret the proceedings during ministerial statements and responses on the topic of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Jeff Leal: I believe we have a ballot swap motion regarding Ms. Albanese and Mr. Yakabuski. I move that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 78 and 1 be waived at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list draw of October 5, 2015, for private members' public business, such that Mr. Colle assumes ballot item number 5 and Mr. Delaney assumes ballot item number 67.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you to all my colleagues here for agreeing unanimously to allow interpretation to take place during these proceedings. It almost strikes me as odd that we need to get special permission to do that, but we're learning as we go sometimes. It's great to see that here today.

I'm honoured to rise today to recognize National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Ontario stands in solidarity with provinces and territories across the country to highlight the skills that people with disabilities bring to the workplace. National Disability Employment Awareness Month is a great way to encourage more companies to tap into this workforce and, like our province, to see accessibility as essential to a competitive and dynamic economy.

What a great time to be celebrating and accelerating our efforts to make our workplaces across Ontario and Canada more accessible. We're hot on the heels of the most accessible Parapan Am Games ever held. We can't help but be inspired by the athleticism, courage and talent of those incredible athletes from across the Americas who participated in these games. Let us use those memories to inspire us to move forward.

To that end, this year we also proudly celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This landmark law is transforming communities right across Ontario into more inclusive, accessible places to live.

While we're global leaders in implementing regulations to enhance accessibility in Ontario, we'll only reach our true potential if we can combine these efforts into a significant, province-wide cultural shift. To that end, this year we launched The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan. A key pillar of this plan is to help businesses understand the value of hiring people with disabilities and strengthening our workforce. We need to change mindsets and build on the progress we've made. We want to make sure that Ontarians are not overlooked in the job pool simply because they have a disability.

There are clear benefits to this. In 2010, the Martin Prosperity Institute outlined that by building an inclusive Ontario, we would see a \$7.9-billion increase to GDP, and that is good for business.

Mr. Speaker, we're focused on being a world leader, setting the standards in accessibility, while building an innovative next-generation economy here in Ontario. To get there, we need the talents and skills of all Ontarians, including people with disabilities.

Along with my special adviser on accessibility, the Honourable David C. Onley, we're focused on promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We're all privileged to have Mr. Onley helping lead these efforts. I can't imagine a more respected or more accomplished Ontarian when it comes to driving us forward to become a more accessible province.

Ontario has an employment standard that was established under the AODA. To be clear, this standard does not force employers to hire people with disabilities, but as part of a significant long-term societal shift, it helps raise awareness and break down barriers for qualified people right from the point of applying for a job. For example, organizations must implement accessibility requirements by a certain time, rather than waiting for an individual to make a complaint under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The public sector has been required to meet the employment standard since 2014, and it will come into force for large private sector and non-profit organizations in January 2016. We want companies to understand that the shift to an inclusive mindset in human resources will help draw the best talent and grow their bottom line.

In our action plan, we announced two new employer-focused programs. Our Ontario Community Loans Program will provide small and medium-sized businesses with discounted rates on financial products, such as loans, when they commit to hiring people facing barriers to employment, including people with disabilities. We'll be partnering with financial institutions to deliver this program next year. We'll also be introducing a new \$5-million Partnership for Accessible Employment program. This program will help small and medium-sized businesses with knowledge and human resources training, to give them confidence in hiring and retaining persons with disabilities.

Our government has also established a Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities. This summer, the council presented its first

recommendations to me, and we are already moving forward on many of them. I want to take this time to thank all members of the partnership council for their past and their ongoing leadership and advice.

Mr. Speaker, while Ontario is a global leader in accessibility, we're also leading the way in cutting-edge accessible technologies and market and investment opportunities. Nowhere was this more apparent than during the province's first and highly successful Accessibility Innovation Showcase, held during the Parapan Am Games. It brought together top innovators, investors, academics, students and the public to see new discoveries and market-ready technologies. Innovators included eSight, an Ottawa-based company whose revolutionary digital technology is making it possible for people with low vision to see. This technology allows people with vision loss to enhance their lives by making education and workplaces accessible to them. It even made it possible for a new mother to see her newborn child for the very first time. More than 50 companies and organizations attended the showcase to demonstrate their amazing accessibility technologies—companies like AlterG, which has developed bionic leg technology, and Komodo OpenLab, which has developed solutions for people with upper-body mobility challenges to gain access to computers, smart phones and tablets. These are just a few of the companies offering incredible technological innovations and further positioning Ontario as an accessibility leader.

Technological advancements may soon level the playing field for people with disabilities. Unfortunately, we're not there yet, and there's still more work to do.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario embarked on its ambitious journey towards becoming an accessible province a decade ago. We're proud of what we've accomplished and look forward to supporting more change in the years to come.

1530

I invite and challenge businesses to work with us to continue to build on our strengths and sharpen our focus, and illuminate our path towards our goal of an accessible province by 2025—an Ontario where people can contribute their skills to the workplace, reach their full potential and help grow our economy. So please join me in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to speak today to National Disability Employment Awareness Month on behalf of our PC caucus. It's wonderful that we have this opportunity to increase awareness about the positive outcomes of hiring people with disabilities. It is true that some people have a disability so severe that they can't enter the workforce in any capacity, but there are many who want paid employment but are unable to attain it, not because of their condition but because of barriers in the workplace.

Discriminatory hiring practices, unwillingness to offer accommodation and accessibility can all be issues. Some

employers may hesitate to hire people with disabilities because they aren't comfortable having that discussion with employees and because they don't have a comfortable working knowledge about disabilities, duty to accommodate, the costs related to accommodations or what their legal obligations may be. The discussion about disabilities has broadened in the social context, and we need to extend that conversation to the workplace.

There were 10 disability types identified in the latest Canadian Survey on Disability: seeing, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain, learning, developmental, mental-psychological and memory. Many of these disabilities are not visible and are not well understood by people who have no personal experience with them. That's exactly why we have National Disability Employment Awareness Month, so we can open up that discussion and help to ensure that good information is out there for employers and for prospective disabled employees.

It's an unfortunate reality that there are almost 800,000 disabled working-age Canadians who are able to work but have no jobs. Almost half of these people have post-secondary education. Very good work has been done to narrow the gap in employment between people living with disabilities and the general population, but there's still much to do. It's not just about having a job; it's also about underemployment and addressing gaps in education and in wages as well.

It's important that we recognize that taking steps to address these issues is not just for the benefit of disabled people, but also for the good of our employers and for Ontario's economy. When it comes to recruitment, companies that open the door a little wider will find a segment of our workforce whose potential is waiting to be unlocked. With rising retirement, failing to build a more inclusive workforce represents a large opportunity cost.

There are many great stories we hear from employers who have realized there are benefits to hiring people with disabilities: for example, the tech companies who are hiring people who fall on the autism spectrum, recognizing how the focus and attention to detail associated with autism can, in fact, be a great asset. Tim Hortons has a great record on this front, and owners of those franchises report that disabled employees are often the hardest working and most dedicated. Other companies are recognizing that it pays to have a diverse workforce that resembles their customer base and can speak to a broader clientele. For those disabled employees, this means independence, confidence and the opportunity to put their skills and knowledge to use.

The benefits of labour market participation are a key component of social integration. In my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, there are many organizations that do great work to provide job skills and facilitate employment for those living with disabilities. Right across the street from one of my constituency offices, we have Middlesex Community Living, which has been doing tremendous work on this front for 50 years that has been

benefiting both the people they support and the entire Strathroy-Caradoc community at large.

The bottom line is that we all see positive social and economic outcomes when we take these steps to build an inclusive workforce that leverages people's abilities instead of focusing on their disabilities. I hope this month will help open up that dialogue and help us move toward a fully inclusive workforce in the province of Ontario.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: This month is dedicated to raising awareness of the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. The definition of "disability" should be interpreted in broad terms. People with disabilities include physical, non-physical, visible and non-visible disabilities of all types, including diabetes, epilepsy, partial hearing loss, chronic pain and depression.

As Ontarians, we understand that employment and economic security are critical to fulfilling our hopes and aspirations. We also know that we are stronger when our province can benefit from the skills and talents of all of our citizens. No individual in our province or country should face unnecessary barriers to success, and no Ontarian with a disability should be limited in his or her desire to work. A large number of working-age Ontarians have some sort of disability. One in seven people in Ontario have been identified as a person with a disability. Over the next 20 years, that number will rise as our population ages. According to Statistics Canada, 15.9% of Canadians have a disability, and an astounding 49% of adults who have a disability are not in the workforce.

People with disabilities are far more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population because of the barriers they face, and most of the time, those barriers are not physical. It's a lot easier to address the barriers we can see, hear or touch, but invisible barriers also make it hard for job seekers to obtain employment. Respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities is the key to preventing and removing barriers, as indicated by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. This includes respect for self-worth, individuality, privacy, confidentiality, comfort and independence of persons with disabilities.

During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we must challenge ourselves as a community to renew our focus on improving employment opportunities and career pathways that lead to good jobs and comprehensive economic futures for people with disabilities. I commend workplaces across the province that have an attitude of inclusiveness and give people with disabilities an opportunity to work.

People with disabilities have the fundamental human right to full integration and participation in society. They should be able to access services, employment and housing, and face the same duties and responsibilities as everyone else. They deserve to retain the small income that they have been able to earn without those earnings being clawed back. When we have this discussion of awareness, it is important that we recognize the financial

hardships that are put on the backs of people with disabilities. It's not fair and it's not acceptable. I was relieved to hear the government's decision to suspend the cancellation of the Work-Related Benefit, funds that allow the opportunity for bus fares, lunches and work clothes. Those funds are the difference between working or not working for some.

As the MPP and critic for community and social services, I will continue to advocate for legislation that will advance the equality for workers with disabilities and play a role in educating my community about accessibility rights and relevant legislation, such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the AODA, as will our NDP critic the member from Essex. He will also be fighting those battles when it comes to the AODA, making sure that we're pushing it forward and holding the government's feet to the fire to make sure that we get it done.

Ontario has laws to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. The goal of the AODA is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises. Businesses have an obligation to make their facilities accessible. Under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, ministries are required to produce and make available to the public annual plans that identify how they will set out and remove barriers to accessibility.

I will continue to address the government in keeping them responsible for supporting the rights of workers in Ontario.

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

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PETITIONS

LAKE NIPISSING WALLEYE FISHERY

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

"Whereas the Lake Nipissing Stakeholders Association's (LNSA) mission is to provide for the long-term health and sustainability of Lake Nipissing and its fishery; and

"Whereas the walleye population is of particular importance to all stakeholders, the association aims to achieve this mission primarily through an intensive walleye restocking program; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's only answer to manage the walleye population decline is through more stringent regulations to the recreational fishery, but fails to impose any restriction on the commercial fishery, and furthermore imposed new restrictions on egg harvest for restocking, making restocking unfeasible; and

"Whereas the LNSA has voluntarily done restocking, without these restrictions for over 30 years;

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

"To remove the restrictions placed on the Lake Nipissing Stakeholders Association (2015) and to allow them to restock Lake Nipissing with walleye at higher volumes (20 million)."

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, as you'll recall, back in June I turned in a petition with 4,000 names. I'm going to give you another 8,732 today. I do this in association with the member from Essex and the member from Windsor West.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ojibway Prairie Complex is a five-park system totalling 332 hectares. It represents half of the city of Windsor's remaining natural areas;

"Whereas Ojibway has 160 species at risk—over 20% and 32% for Ontario and Canada's species at risk respectively. It represents Canada's, and the world's, most endangered ecosystem;

"Whereas over 4,000 species live on the site—over 700 plant types (100 are rare, 70 are in the reserve), over 3,000 insects, 233 bird species with breeding evidence for 71 species, and 16 mammals;

"Whereas Ojibway Park and the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve (OPPNR) are two of the parks in the complex adjacent to the proposed development. These parks are: (1) designated as natural heritage, environmentally significant areas, and in the case of the OPPNR, a provincially significant wetland (PSW) and an area of natural and scientific interest (ANSI); (2) protect biodiversity by hosting: eight endangered and 12 threatened species in Canada;

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

"To designate this land with provincial importance and prevent any development on or adjacent to this land, so that the land will be protected and so too will the 91 species at risk, including six endangered and 12 threatened species on schedule 1 of the Endangered Species Act."

I fully endorse this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to Soham to take up to the desk.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the BDO Canada office in Alliston for sending me this petition. It's entitled "Petition for the redevelopment of SMH."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000 visits and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

“Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth, which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

“Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals,

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

“That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area.”

I agree with this petition and I’m happy to sign it.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to introduce a petition called “Protect Ojibway Prairie.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ojibway Prairie Complex is a five-park system totalling 332 hectares. It represents half of the city of Windsor’s remaining natural areas;

“Whereas Ojibway has 160 species at risk—over 20% and 32% for Ontario and Canada’s species at risk respectively. It represents Canada’s, and the world’s, most endangered ecosystem;

“Whereas over 4,000 species live on the site—over 700 plant types (100 are rare, 70 are in the reserve), over 3,000 insects, 233 bird species with breeding evidence for 71 species, and 16 mammals;

“Whereas Ojibway Park and the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve (OPPNR) are two of the parks in the complex adjacent to the proposed development. These parks are: (1) designated as natural heritage, environmentally significant areas, and in the case of the OPPNR, a provincially significant wetland (PSW) and an area of natural and scientific interest (ANSI); (2) protect biodiversity by hosting: eight endangered and 12 threatened species in Canada;

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

“To designate this land with provincial importance and prevent any development on or adjacent to this land, so that the land will be protected and so too will the 91 species at risk, including six endangered and 12 threatened species on schedule 1 of the Endangered Species Act.”

Speaker, I have to mention that Dr. David Suzuki also supports the efforts to protect the Ojibway prairie. I fully support this petition. I will sign my name to it and send it up with page Sebastian.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by” 58% “and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

“Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

“Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

“Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

“Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

“Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario’s power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign it, and I want to thank Erna Hubal from Alliston for sending it to me.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Mrs. Kathy Whipple. There are over 500 people from Nickel Belt that signed this petition. It reads as follows:

“Hydro One Not for Sale ...

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;”

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

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

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

LUNG HEALTH

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further petitions? I recognize the member from—

Mr. Grant Crack: Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: —which just turned Liberal federally.

Thank you, Speaker. A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children” and youth living with asthma. “Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

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“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

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

“To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry’s private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with this petition and I shall give it to the great Kyle, the page beside me.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have a petition to stop the carbon tax.

“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 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 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 introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was signed by Mr. Moe Paquette from Hanmer in my riding of Nickel Belt. 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 page Julia to bring it to the Clerk.

LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children. Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

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

“To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry’s private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014,

which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues; and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario lung health action plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree, will affix my name to the signatures and send it with Marco.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVASIVE SPECIES ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 SUR LES ESPÈCES ENVAHISSANTES

Ms. McMahon, on behalf of Mr. Mauro, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species / Projet de loi 37, Loi concernant les espèces envahissantes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Ms. McMahon.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak to third reading of Bill 37, the proposed Invasive Species Act. Ontario's natural resources provide a significant source of jobs and economic benefits for our province. They're also a priceless asset in terms of our quality of life. As a consequence, we must take stronger action to address the threats that invasive species pose. We remain committed to addressing this serious threat to our environment and to our economy. With this legislation, our government is showing leadership on this important issue.

I was reminded of this recently when I attended the annual general meeting of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council, held at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. I was pleased to address this forum and had the opportunity to consult them and secure their feedback on the legislation and, perhaps more importantly, its implementation.

One of the reasons why we decided to act is because Ontario is located contiguous to the Great Lakes. As a consequence, our waterways and our extensive trade links make us more vulnerable and put us at greater risk than other provinces. As a result, more invasive species have become established in Ontario than any other Canadian jurisdiction.

Finally, climate change puts stress on ecosystems, making them more vulnerable to threats from invasive species. We need to act so that future generations will continue benefiting from Ontario's rich natural legacy.

Managing invasive species has always been a shared responsibility across all levels of government, with

industry, with environmental groups and with the public. One of the reasons that these partnerships are so critical is because more than 20 provincial and federal acts are used in Ontario to respond to invasive species threats. These include the Canada Shipping Act, a piece of federal legislation that manages the discharge of ballast water; the Plant Diseases Act, a provincial act banning the transport and sale of diseased plants which could include an invasive insect or pathogen; and the Public Lands Act, again a provincial statute that allows land-owners to remove some invasive plants from their shore-lines.

None of these laws were designed specifically to address invasive species. If passed, the Invasive Species Act will be the first stand-alone legislation of its kind in Canada. It would complement the role of the federal government in managing invasive species and it would promote shared accountability for managing invasive species.

Another important aspect of this legislation is how it addresses the threat to our biodiversity. Once invasive species are introduced into the wild with no natural predators, they can spread very quickly. Invasive species often out-compete domestic species for food, and they can destroy the habitat of native species. Invasive species are the second-greatest threat to species at risk in Ontario, and they are a leading cause of extinction of species globally.

Closer to home we continue to hear about the pernicious impacts of two invasive species, not only in our consultation with stakeholders across the province, but also I heard them from representations made at the annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario meeting. Two such examples include invasive phragmites, which release toxins from the roots into the soil to harm and kill surrounding plants. It degrades habitat and decreases food supplies for native wildlife, including several species at risk. The invasive dog-strangling vine impacts the reproduction of the monarch butterfly, which is a species at risk. The butterflies lay their eggs on the plant but the larvae are unable to complete their life cycle and do not survive.

Invasive species are also a quality-of-life issue. Fishing and hunting are fundamental to the tradition of all Ontarians but in particular our First Nations, and Ontarians of all walks of life value our natural environment. Invasive species are a threat to the beauty of our natural areas and all our communities. They impact the lives of every Ontarian and cost the Ontario economy tens of millions of dollars each year. They also threaten resource-based jobs in the forest industry, commercial and recreational fisheries, tourism and agriculture to name a few.

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By applying a risk-based approach that considers the full range of threats, costs and benefits to the environment, society and the economy, Bill 37 would provide the province with better tools to prevent, control, monitor and eradicate invasive species. It would help by providing the powers to intervene earlier to help prevent

invasive species from becoming established. It would give Ontarians the tools to ban activities, such as processing and transporting certain invasive species. It would allow the government to enable rapid-response actions to stop an invasive species from spreading. And, when needed, it would provide strong inspection and enforcement powers as part of a modern regime necessary to prevent threats today and unknown scenarios well beyond those we can anticipate.

A broad range of stakeholders have expressed strong support for further action to address invasive species; indeed, we saw this during public hearings. The stakeholders include municipalities, conservation groups and industry. They recognize the need for stronger action to manage this threat to Ontario's natural environment and our economy.

We have listened to stakeholders and the public and recognize the importance of using clear language in the proposed bill. That is why we amended the names of the classifications from "significant" and "moderate threat" species to "prohibited" and "restricted" species. This language is commonly used in other pieces of legislation and is consistent with class names used in other Great Lakes jurisdictions. This is important because the Great Lakes governors and our Premiers have committed, through bi-national agreements, to work collaboratively to combat aquatic invasive species, so using the same names for classifications strengthens our partnership abilities.

They also provide clarity, enhancing the capacity of the public to understand the rules governing them. The public will further understand and appreciate that "prohibited" means that a species is generally not allowed, and they will also know that "restricted" means that a species may be allowed under certain conditions.

Prohibited species will have the full suite of prohibitions applied to them. Restricted species will have the full suite of prohibitions available to be applied to them; however, these prohibitions and restrictions would only apply if prescribed in regulation. Our government, as consequence, will conduct significant consultations and will solicit feedback from stakeholders and the general public.

By making this change, we are making it clear that prevention is the key to fighting the effects of invasive species and prohibited species that threaten Ontario and state clearly that they are not allowed. This change also provides flexibility to the public and landowners who are vital partners when it comes to invasive species.

The change to "restricted" species would allow prohibitions to be applied on a case-by-case basis. This flexibility will allow us to balance prevention and management objectives with landowners and other interested parties. This change is especially important to landowners who, through no fault of their own, may have restricted invasive species already established on their own property. The goal with restricted species language is to clarify the classification in order to prevent the further spread of these species and to inform the public on how to safely manage them.

Based on additional stakeholder feedback, we have also made an amendment to broaden prevention measures by enabling the preparation of prevention and response plans for all listed species. We have listened to stakeholders and the public and recognize the need to take a more preventative approach to managing invasive species. Enabling the participation from the public and stakeholders is essential to effectively managing and controlling invasive species. Allowing the development of prevention and response plans for both classes of invasive species will better enable and guide partners and stakeholders while undertaking the activities. Prevention and response plans will be available online and easily accessible to interested parties and members of the public. This change will strengthen the act and enhance our ability to implement the tools necessary to successfully prevent, detect and rapidly respond to invasive species threats.

We recognize the need to exempt partners and individuals from sections of the act for the purposes of implementing prevention and response plans. Partnerships and co-operation from the public will be critical to the successful implementation of the act. This change will clarify that an individual is not contravening the act as long as he or she is undertaking the prohibited activity in accordance with the provisions of the prevention or response plan. This means that landowners and partner organizations will be able to assist in the destruction and management of an invasive species while also ensuring appropriate prohibitions are in place to prevent their spread.

When it comes to personal information, we have listened to the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office and have made amendments to strengthen the protection of it. This change makes it clear that information can only be collected for the purposes of notifying individuals that they may have been in contact with an invasive species, giving notice of an order or facilitating public consultation.

Finally, we recognize the importance of making information on actions and orders associated with the proposed Invasive Species Act available to the public. That is why we made an amendment to improve transparency and help with educating the public on actions and orders taken regarding invasive species.

The change will require the ministry to publicly report on the use of any minister's orders to control an invasive species threat. Our government is committed to transparency and making information available about invasive species, and this will be a key component of prevention and response plans.

In closing, no invasive species are currently listed in Bill 37. The proposed act would enable the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to list invasive species and carriers of invasive species that would be subject to the act.

The proposed act would provide the minister with the authority to temporarily designate an invasive species where the threat posed requires immediate action.

If the act is passed, extensive public consultation would occur before any species would be listed in the regulations, and any proposed regulations regarding any invasive species would be based on risk assessments that consider the environmental, social and economic impacts.

Stakeholders, including industry, would have an opportunity to review and comment on any proposed regulations before they are made or enforced. Consultation would include posting proposed regulatory conditions and associated information on the environmental and regulatory registries so that the public and stakeholders could review and comment.

If passed, this proposed legislation would broaden the actions we can take in combatting invasive species. To manage them most effectively, we must find them early and respond quickly.

Preventing new species from arriving and preventing the further spread of those invasive species already here is the most cost-effective approach to addressing the long-term impacts of invasive species.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It is a pleasure to speak to Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act.

The intent of the bill: Those of us on this side of the House agree with the intent of Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act. We understand that invasive species are an urgent problem that has potential catastrophic, adverse impacts on the environment and on the economy. Whether species invade our waters, such as the Asian carp, or our land, such as the invasive phragmites, the potential harm invasive species can cause is significant.

While we support the intent of Bill 37, I still have a number of noteworthy issues with the bill as currently written, which I feel are worth repeating in this forum.

Prior to submitting amendments to the committee, I wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry identifying my concerns with Bill 37. I articulated my feeling of disquiet with the sections authorizing warrantless entry, pointing out that private property rights are the foundation of Western developed civilization and that the continued erosion of the rights of private property owners, even for the noblest of causes, is simply wrong and creates mistrust between residents and government.

I submitted that education and outreach lead to cooperative, mutually respectful relationships with landowners, which results in much better outcomes.

1610

In addition, I asked that the bill be amended to include clearer language on full, fair and timely compensation for the loss of use, enjoyment and/or value of private property.

We all know it is wrong to steal, regardless of the motivation. If it is wrong to steal, I submit that it is doubly wrong for the government to use its monopoly of force to steal from citizens. Governments use vaguely worded terminology such as “the public interest,” as defined by the government, to routinely take private

property from citizens. I cannot emphasize enough that the taking of private property and/or private property rights, such as the loss of use, enjoyment or profitability and/or a decrease in the value of private property, needs to be fairly compensated in a timely manner.

The provincial government’s history with respect to taking and the lack of compensation is disappointing, to say the least, which is why I asked for clear language to be included in the bill to safeguard the rights of private property owners. Unfortunately, that request fell on deaf ears.

Subsequent to the public hearings, we worked diligently to craft thoughtful amendments to submit to the committee which addressed these and other issues—amendments which were tossed out by the government without thought or care.

Costs and benefits: Another related issue I have with the bill as currently written is my well-founded fear that the government will socialize the benefits and privatize the costs of the removal of invasive species through the implementation of this bill. What I mean by that is that society as a whole will benefit from the removal and eventual eradication of invasive species, but the individual landowners will foot the bill. This is unfair on the face of it, given that the threat of invasive species coming onto private property is not necessarily the fault of individual landowners and generally cannot be controlled by individual landowners. The landowners certainly want to help tackle invasive species, but may not have the knowledge or expertise to identify an invasive species and/or the necessary resources to properly remove particular species.

The mismatch between who pays the costs and who reaps the benefits is not a new issue, particularly when it comes to obligations imposed on landowners. Government wants the benefit of the people’s work and resources, but is often unwilling to pay the associated costs.

This same issue plagues the implementation of the Endangered Species Act, which financially penalizes individual landowners who currently host species at risk on their property while exempting everyone else from those costs, including opportunity costs. To reiterate, the landowner who currently hosts the species is at risk to bear costs; those who potentially contributed to the species becoming at risk bear none of the costs. This is upside down and, in the end, incentivizes bad behaviour; namely, “shoot, shovel and shut up.”

People do not want to behave badly, but when you threaten their livelihood and their family, they often feel they have no choice. I believe that government—including legislation, policies and programs—needs to undergo a fundamental attitudinal change to that of incentivizing and rewarding good behaviour rather than prohibiting and punishing everyday common activities, and therefore incentivizing bad behaviour.

People want to do the right thing. We need to find a way that encourages, motivates and assists people, not punishes them for protecting their families and themselves from an intrusive government.

On warrantless entry: In the 17th century, the famous English jurist Edward Coke wrote that a “man’s home is his castle.” In 1763, in a speech to the British House of Commons that vividly illustrated the strengths of the protection of property rights, William Pitt said, “The poorest man may in his cottage bid defiance to all the forces of the crown. It may be frail, its roof may shake, the wind may blow through it, the storm may enter, the rain may enter, but the King of England cannot enter; all his force dares not cross the threshold of the ruined tenement.” Property rights have long shielded homeowners not only from assaults from other people, but also from assaults by government themselves.

In 1991, Canadian Supreme Court Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé wrote, “Both the legislator and society as a whole recognize the truth of Edward Coke’s adage ... property rights are considered fundamental in our democratic society,” which gives rise to the question: Why does this government continue to include warrantless entry into so many of its bills? Warrantless entry is a sure way to anger landowners, if that is the government’s intent. If, on the other hand, the government’s intent is to eradicate invasive species, creating instantaneous suspicion and conflict, and initiating battles with frustrated and angry landowners, is not the best strategy.

Warrantless entry is also a fundamental breach of Canada’s Charter of Rights protection against unreasonable search and seizure. Police officers must obtain a warrant, barring exigent circumstances, to enter private property, even in the pursuit of a suspected murderer. Why, then, are bylaw officers, provincial enforcement officers or even charitable organizations given power-of-entry authority onto private property? Do they have superior training to police? Are they less likely than police to abuse their power? As observed by Peter Jaworski of the Institute for Liberal Studies, it is perverse to say that because the stakes, i.e. the punishments, are less, the protection against unreasonable search and seizure should be discarded.

Increasingly, we are witnessing the creation of laws focused on accommodating the public service—focused on their convenience versus accommodating and protecting the rights of residents.

In conclusion, even though I support the intent of the bill, which is to remedy the problem of invasive species—I will support this bill, but under protest, given the potentially significant adverse social and economic impacts on property owners and municipalities of warrantless entry and the lack of compensation.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: As always, it’s an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, and in this case, on behalf of my NDP caucus and many people in Ontario who have comments on Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species.

I’d like to say from the outset that our caucus supports this bill, but not without some reservations. We all have

the same goal: to stop invasive species from damaging our natural wildlife, from damaging our economy, from damaging our way of life. We have to look at, also, the history of invasive species, because now we have—I guess the ones that come to mind: phragmites, the Asian carp. We have purple loosestrife, which we’re still dealing with.

1620

Actually, if you take a walk in Queen’s Park, in the park part of Queen’s Park, there are a bunch of trees from other parts of the world, and they’ve got plaques on them saying where they’re from. If you take the act too far, they could be invasive species. In my former life as a dairy farmer, the Holstein cow could be conceived of as an invasive species to North America. Obviously, we don’t want to eradicate the trees in Queen’s Park or Holstein cows. But we have to make sure that the act is comprehensive enough and flexible enough to make sure that, although those things sound ridiculous, other actions equally as ridiculous don’t result from this act.

As I’ve often said in this House and will continue to say, it’s easy to make regulations that appear to work wonderfully in these halls, but out in the country or in the suburbs or in the city might not work as well as we think they’re going to.

So while we support the intent, there are a few parts in this bill that cause some concern. We’re going to vote in favour. We can live with them. But we want to make sure they’re on record that they’re not definite enough, and that we have to, in the future, look forward to what the minister does or doesn’t do with them.

This bill gives the Minister of Natural Resources an awful lot of power. In some cases, when you’re dealing with an invasive species, when a species that’s unknown to the province is invading your territory, the minister needs power. We’re not disputing that. But power is dangerous.

If you look at the bill, 15(1), on who is qualified to be an inspector—“The minister may appoint a person or class of persons as inspectors for the purposes of this act”—it says nothing about how qualified these people are or what organizations they belong to. That’s a problem.

In 15(2): “An enforcement officer is an inspector for the purposes of this act by virtue of his or her office.” We’re in favour of that. We have conservation officers who are very good at their job, who know native species, who know introduced species, who know invasive species. They’re good at their job.

In my riding, we’ve got 50 townships that are patrolled by two conservation officers. I think it would be a better idea if, instead of giving the minister—“appoint a person or class of persons as inspectors for the purposes of this act”—to actually say in the act that the minister should make sure that there are enough conservation officers in the province to make sure they can handle the new powers given under this act. That would be better. Right now, in many parts of this province, there are not enough conservation officers to control hunting laws. It’s

easy, it's nice to make a new regulation, which we need, but we also have a duty to make sure that these regulations, which are very powerful, can actually be enforced; that if we have an invasion of a species, which happens—it has happened with the carp; it has happened with phragmites—that we actually have the professional capacity on the ground to deal with it.

Right now, judging by the capacity we have on the ground with the Ministry of Natural Resources on wildlife species, on nuisance bears and on a lot of other issues, it's questionable whether that capacity on the ground exists. Does it exist in theory? Probably. But does it actually exist in a fashion where we can actually react?

One thing that's happened in the past with the SPCA and quality care for animals is that we have people who are involved with animals, with farm animals, and they want to take care of them, and in some cases—not all cases; I don't want to paint with a broad brush. But we have had instances in my riding as well where people didn't have enough training for the powers that they were given, and that was a disservice to the owner of the animal, to the animal and, also, to the inspector who had the best interests of everyone at heart. We run the risk of doing this again, because we don't have the quality of people, the amount, the number—we don't have the number of trained people in the province right now to enforce the powers that are here right now, before we pass this act. So after this act is passed, these people are going to have even less time. So that's a big consideration.

I flip to another section of this act—it's on page 29—29(1). It's regarding compensation. With invasive species, it could very well be that a landowner has an invasive species—and there's two or three different quantifications of species here in this act, and I'm not going to get into that. But it could very well be that a landowner has an invasive species on his property that is discovered, and it's deemed that it needs to be destroyed. That's a loss to the landowner. The landowner himself or herself wasn't responsible for bringing that species there. So this act talks about compensation, and that's a good thing, because it's happened in the past that society wants to make a decision for society, but an individual pays for society's decisions. What happens there, Speaker, is that the results you want from the act don't happen.

That happens with another act: endangered species—very different legislation. In that case, a landowner, if he has an endangered species, often isn't compensated, so as a result the endangered species becomes more than endangered. That's because the Endangered Species Act looks great on paper, but it isn't as good as it could be if it actually worked with the landowner. So at least this act recognizes that there are cases where, when society wants to make a decision for the betterment of society, for the betterment of all Ontarians, all Ontarians should help pay for the betterment. I think it's a step in the right direction. As all acts, it could be more prescriptive, but the fact that compensation is mentioned in the regulations is a good thing.

I'd like to return to the fact that the minister can decide, after we pass this act, who is actually the inspector. There are a lot of powers. You can go, warrantless, on people's property. You can't go in their dwelling; according to this act, the inspector needs a warrant to go into the dwelling, but no warrant to go into the rest of the—now, I'm a farmer, so I'm thinking of a farm. I don't know what kind of invasive species could be in a barn, but if an inspector decided that there is a risk of an invasive species being in someone's barn, they could just trot right into that barn without a warrant, despite biosecurity protocols that that farm would have in place, despite rules like that. That's worrisome, because, with this act, we don't know what training those people will have.

1630

A conservation officer—different story. Conservation officers are well trained. I don't think everyone in the province always agrees with some of their interpretations, but they are well trained. So we have a lot less problem with the conservation officer because we know what their training is, we know what their background is, we know what their purpose is.

But the part where the minister “may appoint”—it doesn't prescribe what qualifications the person has. So you can appoint someone to go warrantless in your farm buildings when the owner doesn't know what the qualifications are. That's a problem with this act, and I think that's something that we have to be very careful and cognizant of as we proceed.

In closing, we are in favour of this act. I, personally, would really like to encourage the government to actually make sure that there's enough horsepower on the ground to enforce the laws we have now regarding species—endangered species, wildlife species and now invasive species—because, right now, it's not there. We need to make sure that laws and rules and regulations that we talk about here actually work in the field, in the forest, in our beautiful lakes and rivers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Just before I continue along with further debate, breaking parliamentary protocol, the score, the last I heard, was 4-0, Kansas City over the Jays.

Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to stand up and speak on third reading of Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act. I was happy to speak during second reading of Bill 37. I, at the time, talked quite a bit about the deficiencies in the bill, as I should as the opposition member, and hopefully during committee time the government would take heed of the notations I made during my debate and possibly affix any amendments to the bill. I'll be discussing that further on down the road, but, first, I am glad Bill 37 has reached third reading. It has been over a year since it was first introduced by the government. Before that, it was introduced in a previous form in their previous term as government, and unfortunately, it hadn't made its way into law yet.

I know Ontario is in desperate need of some sort of organization in order to deal with the invasive species

that are occurring throughout Ontario today. Particularly, we look at Asian carp, and the member from Haldimand–Norfolk has been a champion on dealing with the Asian carp invasion throughout our province. We've seen a few of the carp making it into our waterways. That's quite a concern when you look at the devastation these fish can cause our environment. Unfortunately, I had hoped that, two years ago, when the government first brought out this bill, it would have been a priority for them to pass it and get it into legislation so perhaps we could have prevented some of the problems coming forth with Asian carp.

I know the federal government did their job when, over a year ago, they introduced changes to invasive species in the waterways and, in addition to taking care of ballast water, they introduced a bunch of new regulations that would help to battle the Asian carp. But ideally, we need the province on board in order to deal with the tragedy that may occur if the Asian carp does, in fact, join our waterways, particularly in our Great Lakes.

I also want to talk about phragmites, Mr. Speaker, and the potential phragmites plays in destroying our wetlands, destroying our farmland and destroying any waterways that we may have throughout our cities. I'm proud to say, in my riding, in St. Thomas, David Collins, who's the chair of the St. Thomas Phragmites Control Committee, has been hard at work trying to control phragmites within St. Thomas. They have a goal of, by 2020, St. Thomas becoming phrag-free, and they're well on their way to the goal. I'm sure if this bill is in place, it would enhance the ability for them to attain their goal—and in general, getting access to the necessary chemicals they need in order to fight phragmites.

I'm sure that everyone knows at home what phragmites is: It's that tall, weedy-looking grass that we see every day on the sides of the 400-series highways growing up. I always wondered why nobody was cutting the grass, but it's the phragmites. Their root structure is tremendously huge. It goes through and kills other vegetation along the way. Usually it grows in wet areas; that's why it's always in ditches. Unfortunately, it's such an invasive species that nothing else survives in its potential to grow.

The inability for local farmers and groups such as the St. Thomas Phragmites Control Committee to access the necessary chemicals to deal with phragmites has been terrible. We need safe chemicals, of course—they have to be able to use them in waterways in order so that it doesn't kill our waterways but kills the weed. The necessary way to treat the phragmites is usually in the fall—you nail them in the fall and then again in the spring, and hopefully they don't regrow.

If you don't treat phragmites, which is potentially a problem—we look at Long Point conservation area, which is bordering my riding but, again, into Haldimand–Norfolk's area—the wetlands, the places where ducks live, where they migrate to and from, are being taken over by phragmites. It's definitely an invasive species that needs to be taken control of.

We've seen the effects of phragmites overgrowth already. If you look at Harsens Island, which is on the American side of the St. Clair River, and you look at Walpole Island, which is on the Canadian side—massive fires from phragmites overgrowth. That's the downside of phragmites: It's such a dry plant that it burns up quite like an inferno and quite quickly. Harsens Island was almost burnt to the ground a few years back because phragmites caught fire. The fire department had the boats out trying to control the fire, and it took quite a bit; the same with Walpole Island.

I'm glad Bill 37 has finally made it to third reading. I'm hoping the government can implement this in a timely manner going forward once it is passed, because we've made note that we are supportive of it. Of course, the government, being the majority, will pass it. This brings me back to my concerns, and I'll just reiterate my concerns that we had during the initial reading of this bill:

Public consultation: This bill, again, has had little public consultation from its development. As I said, it has been two sessions of the Legislature. You'd think, when they took the time after the last election, before re-introducing it, they could have had plenty of time to have the proper consultations that certain groups felt they were excluded from, and made the changes to the bill and reinstate it. Obviously, the government wasn't in that much of a rush to get this bill passed; it's pretty close to a year since they introduced it. They could have probably put it off a month or two after having proper consultations.

We find that this bill is very reactive and not proactive. It's harder to deal with a problem once it's already situated in the province. It's better to deal with a situation before it comes in. That is taking an approach—and I got this idea from Ontario Nature, which is an organization which is deeply invested in our environment: to use the pathways approach, which basically outlines what an invasive species is before it hits Ontario, much like they've done down in New Zealand, where they put the necessary precautions in place to stop the invasive species from coming in.

Right now what's going to happen with this bill is, we will have a strategy to deal with invasive species, but we wait until they come and affect our environment. We had hoped the government would have taken a science-based approach of determining what should be prevented from entering the province so it doesn't become an invasive species.

We've also dealt with the information with landowners—downloading the responsibilities to landowners. Who is going to pay for what? Is the government going to have access to woodlots, to simply walk in and clear-cut a woodlot without even talking to the landowner? Under this legislation, that can happen. We kind of wish the wording would have been changed and some sort of compensation would have been in place for the landowners, not only so they don't get stuck with the bill for MNR coming in and clear-cutting, but to compensate

them for the damage that would be done—and hoping to redevelop the land that the government is going to walk in and destroy.

1640

We brought forth many amendments to this bill. It's pages and pages of amendments. I'll tell you what: Not one amendment was approved by this government. It's unfortunate that a government that is wanting to work with the opposition, wanting to make a better Ontario, thinking that we can all work together but, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there was nothing accepted in amendments on the PC side. Again, this government says one thing and does another.

Hopefully, as we go forward—we have two and a half years left to work together for the betterment of Ontario, and I'm hoping, come committee time and when other bills come forward, that when we have a discussion of possible amendments they will listen to us and possibly make some passes.

As I said earlier, I've talked to many groups regarding Bill 37. We do still have our concerns with the bill; we're going to support the legislation, because invasive species—we do need a strategy from the government to help landowners and to help groups that want to deal with invasive species—like phragmites, like I mentioned—so that they have access to the tools that are necessary for them to ensure that the spread of these invasive species is minimized.

We hope the government will go forward and expand upon the Invasive Species Act, going further; maybe they can stick in regulations that we start looking at creating a list using science-based evidence of what we can restrict from coming into this province—much like New Zealand has, as I mentioned earlier—creating a system that protects our environment so that we're proactive and not reactive.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to have the opportunity to make further comments on Bill 37. I look forward to hearing from everyone else.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: May I, at this time, take the opportunity to congratulate the newest member from Windsor–Tecumseh in the House of Commons: Cheryl Hardcastle, a former deputy mayor in the town of Tecumseh, who, by the way, is very active on the environmental file and invasive species. Also in the riding of Essex: Tracey Ramsey has taken over the riding of Essex for the New Democrats, and we're very pleased about that, down in our neck of the woods, in the great southwest.

Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand here today and be the voice of the residents of the riding of Windsor–Tecumseh. It's always an honour to stand in this House and take part in the debate, but when we're talking invasive species, it really hits home because, down in our neck of the woods, we're a part of the Great Lakes river system—the St. Lawrence River system, if you will. It extends all the way up through, starting at our 100 Mile

Peninsula, if you will, down around the Pelee peninsula or south Detroit, whatever you want to call us.

We are very familiar with the history of the invasive species on the Great Lakes. If you go back to the 1970s, I can recall the big debate over the sea lamprey eel at that time. The sea lamprey got into the Great Lakes. It was eating a lot of the fish—many good fish. Then I think that was followed by the spiny water flea, the round goby, zebra mussels, purple loosestrife and the emerald ash borer.

I remember being on city council for seven years, and we had to deal with the first hit in Ontario of the emerald ash borer. It cost us millions of dollars, because we lost thousands of trees, trees that used to be on our boulevards and in our parks system and on our great streets. You have to take them down, Speaker, when the emerald ash borer gets into the ash trees, because they weaken them. You can't leave them up because, in high winds, they'll come down. They'll come down on cars; they'll come down on homes; they'll come down on children playing in the parks, if the emerald ash borers attack the trees that are in our city parks.

Right now, of course, the big war is over phragmites. Phragmites looks like a decorative grass, like the old, tall prairie grassland that we used to have in a great part of southwestern Ontario, but it isn't. It's an invasive species and it eventually will wipe out a large part of the vegetation.

I think the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane spoke about the patchwork of the 20 or so federal and provincial bills dealing with invasive species. At least this bill, the provincial bill, will put it all in one ministry, and that is long overdue.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane also talked about the number of inspectors that will be needed. Of course, if you're going to be hiring inspectors to keep track of all of these invasive species, you need money, and there's no money in the budget. In fact, the ministry is one of the ones that's getting a 6% cut, so where the inspectors who are going to police this new bill whenever it gets up and running are going to come from, I don't know.

When you talk about losing, say, a tree, such as an ash tree, and you think of the value of a tree, some people just take them for granted. But when you think, really, they're the lungs of the Earth and they improve the air that we breathe; they take the pollution out of the air. It's important to us in my part of the province, because the prevailing winds blow pollution from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois; they blow that bad air from the coal-burning plants, the steel mills and so on into southwestern Ontario. So we need all the trees we can get.

I remember when I was on the Essex Region Conservation Authority, I planted hundreds and hundreds of trees every year. I was on the authority for seven years, chair for a year, vice-chair twice, and I planted a lot of trees, Speaker. That is so important, and I give full credit to the Essex Region Conservation Authority for all the work they do, let alone alerting us to invasive species but also

the planting of trees, not only to replace the ash trees that we've lost but all species of trees which help us breathe better air. I think that's a very important thing that we do.

Earlier today, the member from Windsor West and I presented a petition to the House. We're talking in this bill about invasive species, but the petition we presented has over 12,000—12,873 or something like that—names of people who are worried about protecting the land around the Ojibway Prairie Complex. That's a park system right on the river, right near the Detroit River, and it totals 332 hectares. It represents half of the city of Windsor's remaining natural areas.

We're talking invasive species, but at the Ojibway nature complex we have 160 species at risk. That's 20% of Ontario's species at risk and 32% of Canada's species at risk, and it's the world's and Canada's most endangered ecosystem. We have 4,000 species living on the site: over 700 plants, 100 of them rare; 3,000 insects; and, if you do a manual bird count, 233 bird species. We have breeding evidence, actual evidence, for 71 species. We also have 15 mammals. So as we talk about invasive species, we have to do more to protect the species that we have already who are at risk.

And where this park is, Speaker—I know you've been down around there, down around Windsor Raceway—has been designated as natural heritage. Environmentally significant areas are there. It's a provincially significant wetland right there and an area of natural and scientific interest. The way we protect biodiversity—it hosts 12 endangered species right there, so they want us to do more to protect what we have as we discuss the threat of invasive species coming in and the inspectors that we need for that.

When you have 91 species at risk, including six endangered and 12 threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, I think we have to do more to help those people in their petition drive, and I hope that the government will eventually see fit to do so.

1650

At various times in the last few weeks, we've been up talking about—let alone invasive species—the need to protect the Great Lakes. I think we're all pretty well on board, at least in the Liberals and the New Democratic Party, on protecting the Great Lakes—a bill that we are fully supportive of. As I say, when you live in that 100 Mile Peninsula and are bordered by water on three sides, you know the value of the Great Lakes.

We've seen the lakes used as a political football, and I hope that nobody uses this species-at-risk/invasive species bill as a political football. What we need more than anything else, I think, are some timelines to actually get some things done, some money in the bill to actually do everything that we want to do.

When I was talking about the threats to the Great Lakes not that long ago, Speaker, I brought to your attention the great Canadian author Pierre Berton. Pierre Berton wrote a coffee table book back a few years ago, about 20 years ago, called *The Great Lakes*. This great Canadian iconic author saw Lake Superior as “remorse-

less and masculine.” Lake Huron, to Mr. Berton, has 30,000 islands; it reminded Mr. Burton of “a fussy maiden aunt,” while Lake Michigan, half wild to the north and heavily industrialized in the south, he saw as “an errant uncle.” Pierre Berton said that Lake Erie “is a wilful ingenue of changeable mood and false promise.” As you know, Speaker, Mr. Berton lived in Toronto, and when he looked out at Lake Ontario, he saw Lake Ontario as “a complacent child.”

We recognize the value of the Great Lakes, but we know that invasive species can easily get into the Great Lakes. We've all heard in recent weeks, months and years of Asian carp and the threat of Asian carp getting into the lakes and destroying the species that we have now that thrive in the Great Lakes.

I know the federal member for Windsor West, Brian Masse—congratulations, Brian, by the way, on your victory last night, a resounding victory in Windsor West—has been talking at the federal level about the threat of Asian carp and the need to, if you catch them, eviscerate them before you can ship them. If you get these carp and they get away and get into the lakes and propagate, we're going to have a real problem.

Brian Masse has also made a big deal out of a lot of the other things that threaten the Great Lakes, such as those minuscule little plastic beads that you don't really see, but they're there in our toothpastes and shampoos and so on.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Microbeads.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Microbeads; yes, thank you. The member from Nickel Belt is right on when she says “microbeads,” because they're very, very small, Speaker, as you know.

They're getting into the fish, and it's becoming very hazardous. Those of us who like fish—I grew up on the east coast, and my grandfather, my mother's father, made his living as a fisherman back in the day. When he was a boy, he would get on a schooner and go out in the middle of the Atlantic. They'd put him in a little dory and he'd row out, put his cod trap out, put his net out, and catch the cod, then try to find the schooner. Sometimes, in the fog, it was difficult, or in terrible, terrible weather.

As a child, I used to enjoy summer vacation, getting into a little dory with my grandfather and jigging codfish or jigging squid. I remember one time we filled the little dory right up to the gunnels with squid. Nobody of his generation ate squid; they used it as a bait to put on the hook to catch cod. But those were the days where I had a great appreciation of nature, of water and of fish, so when I came up here to the Great Lakes—I get nervous when people talk about invasive species and how invasive species, if you allow them in, can take right over. We've seen, as you know, on the east coast, the decimation of the cod industry, where now in Newfoundland, you normally get out once in the spring and once in the fall for a couple of weeks to actually do what we used to do every day down there, just go out and catch your dinner.

When we talk about the importance of invasive species, I think we really—no matter where we live in

this great province. Wherever we live, be it in the Far North or, where I am, in the deep south, east or west, you have to take seriously any threat of the species. If you have invasive species coming in, be it in the water, be it in the air, be it in the trees, we have to take it very seriously.

This bill is a good step in a lot of those directions. I think we have to do what we can to protect what we have, and this bill does that, although it doesn't go all that far enough. There isn't enough money in there to do everything that it purports to do. As the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane was talking about, the accreditation of the inspectors that are needed—we haven't really nailed that one down yet.

I just think we have to do more. I think the bill is worth supporting, especially when you look at some of the fines that may be imposed—a maximum fine of \$250,000 for individuals and imprisonment of up to a year, and actually for corporations it could be \$1 million. If you have a fish store and you're bringing in Asian carp and you get caught, you could be facing \$1 million. I think that would put most of us out of business.

I will say, if we haven't already talked about it, that the bill does have the support of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Forest Industry Association and the Ontario Invasive Plants Council, but some of those agencies do say that more funding is needed.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. I hope all members of this House will take this very seriously, and the bill is certainly worth supporting.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Just off the get-go—a couple of other people have done so—I'd like to acknowledge Marilyn Gladu, the new federal member-elect in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, newly elected last evening. I'm looking forward to working with her through my provincial office. I know she'll do an excellent job for the electors and for the constituents of Sarnia–Lambton.

With that out of the way, I'm also pleased to rise and speak to Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act. We understand the impact that invasive species can have on our environment, whether it's our lakes, our wetlands or our forests. We also understand how difficult they are to control, when they can enter the province through so many different methods and in so many locations: through lakes and rivers, like the Asian carp; through the air; through boating; through the transportation of raw wood and other forest products; through importing products made from animals. There are plants, fish and insects, such as the emerald ash borer beetle and the Asian long-horned beetle.

It is a complicated issue that should have had extensive debate and committee hearings. That's why when I spoke to this bill on second reading, I asked the government to hold committee hearings in different parts of the province to ensure that we were hearing from everyone who had a role to play in protecting Ontario from in-

vasive species, and to hold a committee meeting in the north to make sure that we were hearing from the forest industry.

In 2014, the port of Hamilton handled more than 10.5 million tonnes of liquid, dry and break bulk cargo. Shouldn't the committee have gone there to hear from them? The Windsor–Detroit gateway is Canada's busiest land border crossing. Shouldn't the committee have gone to hear from them? And Sarnia–Lambton as well—the second-busiest border crossing. In fact, when they spoke at the hearing, the Ontario Invasive Plants Council recommended developing six to 10 regional plans to prevent invasive species from entering this great province. Shouldn't people in those regions have had an opportunity for input?

Instead, last June, the government moved a motion which limited committee hearings to two days, and with the way in which they structured the motion, it forced both of those hearings to be here in Toronto. So instead of travelling to hear from the people who should be part of the fight against invasive species and who will be impacted by this bill, the committee listened to the people of Toronto.

1700

In fact, Robert Whiteside from the Current River Hydro Partnership tried to have his voice heard and to present to the committee by telephone, but the connection was so bad that he asked my colleague the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills to deliver a letter to the committee later on his behalf. He had concerns with the definition of invasive species, but by that point, the government's time allocation motion wouldn't allow any more amendments. Some organizations were so limited on time and had so much more to say that the members on the committee gave up their time to allow these organizations to speak.

Limiting debate and opportunities for these organizations to participate is not listening as the people of Ontario are having conversations, as this government promised. Instead of advertising in regional papers to ensure that different organizations and people had a chance to provide input and make this bill better, the government limited notice to the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire. And instead of allowing all parties to work together in committee to create the best of amendments, the government prohibited new amendments during clause-by-clause.

The Ontario Invasive Plant Council said during committee hearings that “the act does little to engage the majority of Ontario's organizations that have direct interest in control of invasive species, and does little to provide tools that will control unlisted species or tie together a collaborative, integrated approach.” They also asked to have municipalities more involved.

In their presentation, Forests Ontario said that “efforts must be made to develop collaborations to assist in the implementation of invasive species programs.”

We put forward amendments that would have made this bill more collaborative, so that it was working with the owners of the land rather than punishing them. We put forward an amendment to try to make decisions more science- or evidence-based, which the government blocked. We put forward an amendment to prevent warrantless entry—which the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills spoke about earlier, and the member from the third party—which, again, the government blocked.

I know that there are many people in the Legislature who don't understand the unintended impact of this clause on things like biosecurity on our farms. Our livestock is impacted by diseases that travel across borders, just like invasive species. I want to commend the farmers on the steps that they take to reduce the spread of these diseases and to protect their livestock. Over the last couple of years, farmers in my area of southwestern Ontario have dealt with PED and H5N2 avian influenza. One of the ways that these diseases spread is on the clothing, footwear and vehicles of visitors to the farms. An employee from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry travelling farm to farm to look for an invasive species could accidentally contribute to the spread of these diseases if they don't follow the biosecurity protocols.

Farmers themselves are taking preventative measures to prevent diseases from spreading, such as building truck washes, but in order to be successful, they also need control over who visits their property. That's why it's important that no one is simply granted access to private property; instead, they should have to get permission, so there's an opportunity to have that conversation, an opportunity for the farmer to explain why it's important to change his footwear, or for the farmer to prevent the employee from visiting after being on an infected farm.

We made this point during second reading debate, and it appears that the government chose not to listen. This is a government that once boasted about having conversations, but now, our entire third reading conversation on this complex issue is limited to two—count them; two—hours divided among three parties. The government time-allocated this bill after only three days of debate: one day per month, March, April and May. Let's put that in context. The government reintroduced this bill last December, so in six months, they only chose to call the bill for three days, and then felt it was necessary to time-allocate it to get it through.

The timing of that motion meant that the government couldn't call the bill until this September, some nine months after it was first introduced. They didn't make it a priority to debate the bill, and then forced it through, with limited committee hearings and debate. If they had chosen to call it for additional days of second reading last spring, maybe they could have spent time travelling last summer to hear from the people who have been impacted or will be impacted. They could have gone to the north to listen to the forestry industry. They could have gone to

border cities like Windsor, Niagara, Sarnia and Cornwall. They could have given those organizations more time to express their concerns.

The people who will be impacted by this bill deserve better. The people who are impacted by invasive species deserve better. Our environment deserves better. It's something that we often hear from stakeholders: that they want to be part of the solution. They want an opportunity to share their concerns and they want government to listen. We've heard from stakeholders who say they used to have those opportunities, but now they don't. We've heard from stakeholders who are frustrated that the government seems to charge ahead without giving people and organizations that will be impacted the opportunity to have meaningful input.

Even though they're forcing this bill through, I hope the government will take the time to reach out to those stakeholders as they implement the bill to make sure it works. For the future, I hope the government will the importance of hearing from people outside Toronto: people from Oxford, people from Sarnia–Lambton, Niagara, London, Windsor, Ottawa, Cornwall—both from MPPs who represent those areas and, through travelling committees, from the people directly.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad to have a few minutes to talk about Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species.

As you know, Speaker, I represent a northern rural riding, the riding of Nickel Belt. I can tell you that, throughout my riding, forestry was a great industry. When you talk about invasive species, the first thing that comes to mind, the one that all Canadians have followed, had to do with the mountain pine beetle and the damage that it did to the forest industry in British Columbia.

Of course, you can find those invasive species—the mountain pine beetle could easily have been found in the boreal forests of Nickel Belt, so it is extremely important that we have a monitoring system in place, that we have a good preventative system in place in order that the devastation that has happened in British Columbia does not repeat itself in Nickel Belt, or anywhere else in Ontario, for that matter. The boreal forest is something for all of us to share, and we know that an invasive species can destroy a great part of a boreal forest in no time flat.

I, like both of my colleagues who have spoken before me, am worried that there are no resources attached to this bill. In order for people on the ground, boots on the ground, to do the monitoring, to do the science, to do the inspection, you need to have people on the ground. Those people are going to be part of MNR, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Let me tell you, Speaker: During constituency week, I had the pleasure to meet with a representative of MNR in my riding, like I do on a regular basis. The first thing we talked about was trapping minnows. Lots of people in my riding make a living with a bait-and-tackle shop. They trap minnows and sell them to anglers and fishermen, and they make a good small business out of it. Well, the way

it works is that you get a township, you get an area, where you're allowed to trap minnows. MNR gives you the permit to trap minnows in an area. But the MNR is so backlogged—when you don't use your township any more, when you don't trap minnows any more, it is supposed to go back to MNR and be auctioned off. Now you can go on Google any time of the day, Speaker, and you will see that people who hold those licences are actually selling them to other people. That's not right. That's actually illegal, because the township—the right to harvest minnows is something that belongs to the crown, is something that is governed by MNR, but MNR is so under-resourced that they don't have time to make the system work the way it is. People have found out about it, and some people are making money doing things that shouldn't be happening, but MNR doesn't have the resources to stop them.

I talked to them about selling crown land. I mean, I've been an MPP for eight years, Speaker. Did you know that there are people who came and saw me the first week I was elected to tell me about the problem of buying crown land? They have a land use permit with the MNR. Their neighbours to the right and their neighbours to the left got to buy crown land. They're smack in the middle, and eight years later, Speaker, we still do not have a deal. Why? Because MNR does not have the resources to do its work, to seek the market value of the land that they're supposed to sell.

1710

Why am I talking about this, Speaker? Because the connection is direct: Do I want my province, my forests, to be protected from invasive species? Of course. Everybody does. We want our lakes to be healthy, we want our forests to be healthy, we want our environment to be healthy, but in order for that to happen you need to have boots on the ground. You need to have resources within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for this to happen, but right now, they don't have the resources to do the job that's already on their docket.

Let's talk about bears. I come from Nickel Belt. We had over 2,000 complaints against bears last summer. Most of them, the great majority of them, came from Nickel Belt. When I sit down with the people from MNRF, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, it is clear that some of the decisions that were made back in 2009 when changes were brought in were directly linked to a lack of resources. As the resources from MNR—it wasn't MNRF at the time, it was just MNR—were squeezed out, they made decisions that have a direct impact as to the thousands of bear complaints that we've had in our community.

What could ever lead us to believe—lead me to have confidence—that MNR suddenly will find, within their own resources, boots on the ground to make sure that Bill 37 is actually carried out? Because right now, for me, Bill 37 is wishful thinking. It is motherhood and apple pie. Do we want to protect ourselves against invasive species? I don't know too many people who would say, "Oh, no, Speaker. We don't want to protect ourselves

against invasive species." Of course we do. The support is there. It could have been done way better, and my colleagues have talked about this, and certainly colleagues from the PC Party have also talked about how we could be more sensitive to protecting private landowners from those measures. But none of this is possible if there are no resources.

I'm here at Queen's Park. I look at what kind of resources were allocated in the budget in order to carry out this new bill that everybody thinks is a great idea. Well, the response is not only do we have zero allocation of new resources, we actually have a cut to that ministry. So that ministry that cannot do a good job with the township allocation for minnow trapping, this ministry that cannot do a good job at selling crown land because they don't have the resources, this ministry that cannot do a good job at handling bear complaints when it comes to the safety of our residents is going to be tasked with even more responsibility.

Speaker, this being the fall season—one of my favourite seasons, right after winter—it's hunting season. If you come from Nickel Belt, it doesn't matter where you go in Nickel Belt, everybody is with the NDP. No, not really; they're wearing orange because they're hunting, but it looks like they're with the NDP, doesn't it? It does. Everywhere you go, people are wearing orange. If it's not the hat, it's the jacket, the pants, the whole—it's because they're hunters.

There are hunters throughout my riding, Speaker, and, if you look, the story is pretty sad. There were very few moose tags allocated in Nickel Belt this year for reasons based on science, and all of that was explained to me. But look at the scenario here, Speaker. You have people who have paid to be in a draw for 30 years in a row, 25 years in a row, 20 years in a row, and never got a tag. They have entire hunting parties that have no tags for moose. A tag is what you need to be able to go hunting for a moose, and it will tell you if you can harvest a cow, if you can harvest a bull or if you can harvest a baby moose. But if you have no tag, you can't. For all the areas around Gogama, which right now has more NDP-like, but really, hunters dressed in orange per square mile than you can shake a stick at, there is one conservation officer. So you're talking hundreds of hunters with all sorts of different calibre rifles walking through the forests, some of them bird hunting, some of them hunting rabbits—it's kind of cute right now, because we have no snow on the ground. We had a little bit, but not much snow on the ground in Nickel Belt, but the rabbits have already shed their fur, so they're already kind of in the process of going from brown to white. They're pretty easy to see when they're wearing that white fur coat because the temperature has changed and their coat has changed, but there is no snow on the ground. They make easy targets.

All this to say that I have a lot of hunters throughout Nickel Belt going about their business, some of them are really unhappy that they did not get a tag for a moose or a deer, and are not able to go hunting. Then they look at it

and say, “Really, what is my chance of being caught? We only have one—a very good one, don’t get me wrong—conservation officer. We have hundreds of kilometres of forest. What if I take a chance?”

Then poachers start. We have those great posters that say, “Report a poacher.” What does that mean? That means that we haven’t got enough conservation officers within MNR to do their job, to make sure that the hunters are respectful of the tags you’ve given them and of the different laws.

Here’s another law that I will support and everybody else in my caucus will support. This responsibility will fall on the shoulders of the MNR, and MNR is already—how I can say it?—under-resourced to the point where it is really hard for them to discharge their responsibility successfully. People know that. They know this, and it’s a real shame.

So I’m all in support for Bill 37, but right now all it is words on paper.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and happy belated birthday to you, sir—a very big milestone last Wednesday, I’m told.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s 65 bigs.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: “Senior” big—he’s an official senior. He’s looked it for years but now he’s caught up.

It is a pleasure to speak to Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species. I want to bring forward a number of comments on behalf of colleagues, both from our party, but more importantly from my constituents from the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I want to start off by acknowledging the efforts of my caucus colleague and the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, Toby “The Duke” Barrett, who has been an advocate—and a very vocal advocate—on this file for many years.

In fact, I think Toby was probably the first to identify the Asian carp issue. He has been consistent, persuasive and determined to bring the threat of Asian carp forward to this government’s attention and to seek immediate action to stop it from invading our waters. It is a very big threat and we need to be all eyes, all hands on deck, pardon the pun—paying attention.

I also want to congratulate my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Larry Miller on his re-election. Larry brought out a bill—although not invasive species—called C-383, the Transboundary Waters Protection Act. Again, all about water: We are surrounded in our great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound by the Great Lakes, so obviously, anything to do with water is of paramount concern to us and to the livelihoods and, most importantly, the health of our constituents going forward.

As I have shared, my constituency is part of the Great Lakes communities, and we see first-hand the damage our waters sustain and the threats to our lifestyle as a result of those concerns. From invasive species to falling

water levels, all of these can seriously hurt local businesses and tourism.

Just a couple of things: the 28th Salmon Spectacular fishing derby, organized by the Sydenham Sportsmen’s Association and the Bruce Peninsula Sportsmen’s Association. It’s a huge, huge event that brings thousands of people to our community, and it’s a great opportunity for people to be able to go out and fish and enjoy the Great Lakes waters in our backyard. The 31st Chantry Chinook classic fishing derby: again, a great fishing derby right in our backyards, closer to my colleague Lisa Thompson from Huron–Bruce, but again, it provides a lot of economic spinoff, a lot of great enjoyment, and brings a lot of people back to the waters to be able to enjoy their time.

Last year, falling lake levels grounded the Chi-Cheemaun ferry for a period of time. Again, a whole different challenge with our waters, but I’d like to actually extend appreciation to my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin, Michael Mantha, and the current cabinet Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Michael Gravelle, who then was in MNR. We worked collaboratively and we were able to work on that to get some challenges taken care of that allowed the Chi-Cheemaun to sail, which again has huge economic impact on my riding certainly and that of Algoma–Manitoulin, on Manitoulin Island.

1720

Just as that one came back—the levels have come back to a more normal level—now, of course, one of the biggest concerns we have is the threat of invasive species like phragmites—a big, big concern. In 2014, I was involved with the Stop the Drop campaign with Colin Dobell. As I mentioned, now they’ve turned their attention as an organization to the phragmites. If you drive virtually anywhere in the province, you’re seeing it. It’s very invasive. It starts here and it actually starts choking out any other plant life around it. You really have to get down—I was fortunate enough to go to an overview from the national parks staff from the peninsula and they shared this: that you really have to go right down and tear these things out by the roots to be able to get these out of there. It’s very challenging, and very much they encroach and take over all other plant life.

We need to encourage the public to take action to protect our shoreline from the phragmites invasion—they are like Asian carp—they just have roots and are very challenging to get rid of. They grow up to five metres tall and can grow even through asphalt. There is no doubt that invasive species present ecological and economic threats.

We also have threats from the emerald ash borer, an invasive species that has killed thousands of ash trees throughout southern Ontario. Again, it’s one of these things where people may inadvertently grab some of that wood in more southern areas, like yours in Essex, and drive up to the beautiful Bruce Peninsula, bringing that wood that actually has the emerald ash borer. It very quickly spreads and is a challenge in all of those areas.

In our riding, Saugeen conservation provides landowners, businesses or municipalities an inoculation treatment. For \$500, you can buy a biological agent called TreeAzin to combat the emerald ash borer. It's estimated that this emerald ash borer will cost us over \$2 billion over a 30-year period. And we have yet to determine the ripple effects, which are the ecological impacts of ash tree mortality on aquatic organisms, birds and understory vegetation.

In Canada, invasive plants alone cost the farming and forest industries an estimated \$7.3 billion per year. As such, my constituents—there are people who are actually going to pay the freight and be most impacted by these types of bills. They're paying very close attention to this legislation and they've provided important feedback. While they applaud the government's efforts, they remain concerned with the manner in which some of these plans may be executed.

Number one, the bill does not outline a science-based approach to risk assessment and decision-making. One of the things I try to do when I come here is stick with policy but based on scientific fact. We've tried to do that with a number of things: through the environment, through neonics, through certainly the Green Energy Act. We try to rely on science to ensure that we're getting the best information we can from those experts, the scientific facts, and then make the policy decisions based on that.

Inspection powers: The bill is punitive—warrantless entries—and presents fairness issues. Again, we want to just ensure that, while good in intent, it's not allowing a heavy-handed person to go in and take actions that are not acceptable, particularly to the landowner, who may have inherited one of these invasive species with no real recourse at their end.

The act downloads responsibility of implementation to landowners, leaving little incentive for landowners to act. One of the concerns I've heard, particularly from farmers, is that if something happens—you know, a lot of these are small farming operations. If that invasive species ends up on their very specific piece of land and the government comes along and says, "You shall mitigate in this manner," many of those people don't have the resources, they don't have the ability, financial or otherwise, to be able to truly combat that and adhere to what the government's saying, even though they may want to do that. Again, most landowners, particularly farmers living on the water, living off the land, are stewards of the land, and they want to do what's right because it's their family, first and foremost, that they're worried about. They want to have the safest environment possible, but at the end of the day, if something comes onto their land and they have no ability to mitigate that and the government comes along, it can be very, very onerous, very stressful, and puts a lot of undue stress on them and their families. And what happens to the potential down the road for the younger children, the next generation to take over the family farm?

Number three, Ontario's enforcement officers are already under-equipped to adequately deal with existing

legislation. Many, many cuts to the MNR—for example, the MNR upended the long-time bear management program and downloaded this responsibility to police who are not trained in wildlife management. Again, I've heard lots of concerns of that in my riding. The bears have become an issue at certain times. OPP police officers go out and they're saying, "This isn't our area of expertise. This should really be the MNR."

We've had a lot of MNR conservation officers in our area—we used to have five or six. When I was a young man starting actually to hunt in the Bruce Peninsula, there were five or six just in our area of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Now you're lucky to see one, Mr. Speaker. I know a retired conservation officer, Joel Tost, who fought this when he was still an officer. He was very concerned about the stewardship, the ability for him to truly do a good job, to enforce and ensure that the long-term sustainability of our fisheries, of our deer population, of all of our wildlife resources was going to be taken care of, but they continued to decline. People—I think my colleague from the north, France, said—

Interjection: Nickel Belt.

Mr. Bill Walker: Nickel Belt. Thank you. I always do the name. I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Nickel Belt was talking about boots on the ground. One of the big challenges is having boots on the ground to ensure they're working with the landowners, to be able to work with the organizations, like our sport fishing groups, to ensure that there are abilities for them to mitigate and be part of the solution and be hands-on.

The bill isn't perfect. It's a first step in tackling the invasive species threat and helping to benefit the health of our waters.

I just want to share a couple of other things in my last couple of minutes. We are the Great Lakes basin, and the threat of invasive species is significant to all of us. It's not just me in the beautiful Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound area—I encourage anyone out there who has never visited us to come. We truly are a paradise unto itself, surrounded by beautiful, glistening waters, but something like the Asian carp can wipe that out in a heartbeat, because it has such a negative impact on our economy—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Tourism is important. It has a negative impact on tourism.

Mr. Bill Walker: Absolutely. The negative impact on tourism, as my colleague from Huron-Bruce said, who's a great member of this Legislature and truly stands up for the environment, certainly, and farming—big-time—but also tourism, because it is a huge part of our area. We have to have tourism to be able to thrive and survive going down the road.

We want to ensure, as I said earlier, that independent scientists are able to identify significant challenges and to be able to put in resolutions that we can all work to mitigate. We want to ensure that there isn't a heavy-handed scheme that is going to put undue challenges on innocent persons—again, someone who actually just happens to be the landowner. This invasive species ends

up on their property, and they have the whole responsibility to mitigate that. That's a challenge, and government needs to help support those and not totally download all of those costs on them.

The bill seems a bit rushed. I think one of my colleagues from Sarnia–Lambton—a very esteemed member, again—suggested that there was limited time for debate for this. They are rushing it through the House. I'm not certain the exact term that he used—really, they were shutting down debate or rushing debate through. We want to make sure these things, when may have such a significant impact on our whole province—our whole country, in fact—are actually done logically, thoroughly and with that scientific community involved.

There are not a lot of precautionary, preventive actions oriented with this bill; it's more reactive, after something gets in. Like health care, we want to be more proactive; we want to keep people healthy as opposed to always trying to fix them afterwards. No different here: We don't want to try to fix it once we allow Asian carp into our waters. We want to put regulations in place that absolutely ensures that Asian carp will not get in and decimate our great fishery.

We want to ensure that there are enough resources to handle the inspections. It's one thing to have a piece of legislation that says “you shall and you will,” but if there aren't the boots on the ground to actually enforce and ensure the people are engaged and actually working collaboratively with you, then, again, it's really just a piece of paper. We want to ensure that it does not remove property rights from landowners. Actually, it inversely prevents the landowner from proactively dealing with invasive species.

We really, truly want to be able to support this, Mr. Speaker. I think that with lots of opportunity to have input, we can find some good legislation. I applaud Minister Mauro for bringing it forward as a first step.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Tuesday, June 2, 2015, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. McMahan has moved third reading of Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I just received a deferral slip: “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on third reading of Bill 37 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, October 21, 2015.” It's signed by the chief government whip.

1730

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day?

STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING
GOVERNMENT ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RENFORCEMENT
ET L'AMÉLIORATION
DE LA GESTION PUBLIQUE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 7, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to strengthen and improve government by amending or repealing various Acts / Projet de loi 85, Loi visant à renforcer et à améliorer la gestion publique en modifiant ou en abrogeant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this item of business was last debated, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry had the floor, with time remaining. I recognize the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's a privilege, of course, to get up in the House to talk about an initiative that I think is very much—I would hope that it's well intentioned. It's An Act to strengthen and improve government by amending or repealing various Acts. It's something that's quite surprising when you look at the record of this government, but it's nice to see that at least they're taking the initiative to put something in writing. It looks like they intend to do something.

When you look at the number of acts that are actually involved here, it's a large number. It's a caretaker bill, for sure. I think we see the Provincial Offences Act, the Executive Council Act, the legislative act, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act—that's an interesting one, because freedom of information is very difficult, with this government, to secure for the people, let alone the members of the Legislature—the Public Service of Ontario Act, the Proceedings Against the Crown Act, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and, I think, the Ministry of Transportation. So it's a caretaker bill. It's meant to clean up a number of issues. It touches health care, but I don't see in the bill where it's actually improving health care. To do that, you need to root out waste and to build a more patient-centric model of care.

We look at this government's record: eHealth, \$2 billion wasted; Ornge, another billion dollars. And what have we seen in Ornge? What have we seen happen to this government? Really, nothing. There's a police investigation going on to look at the mismanagement, but that has been going on almost since we got here. We really don't see anything happening. We've only scratched the surface. When we had the ability, through committee, to actually question this government, it seemed that everything was done to make sure we didn't find out what was happening.

The Green Energy Act: \$8 billion a year wasted.

These aren't our numbers. These are the numbers of the Auditor General's report from just a little over a year ago, issued, I think, on the day we rose for the winter session—maybe just a coincidence, but obviously

intended to be possibly forgotten before we came back in February.

We look at money being wasted. We mentioned eHealth. We still have no medical electronic records system in this province. We have other provinces that have gleaned theirs from pharmacists at no cost. We have no integrated system. Let's be serious; that's just the way it is.

In my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, when I was the mayor of South Glengarry, at one of the conventions, the government was promoting a nurse practitioners' clinic. We went home, we applied; we weren't successful in the first round. There were about 10 to 12 clinics that were approved in the first round. We applied again, got a consultant in; we were successful in the second round. It's an important thing in our riding because there are many, many people with no doctors. We had an instance of one doctor who had retired due to health reasons and had well over 2,000 patients. They had no place to go. So the clinic, although late, was certainly important in our riding, and it was something that I think was well needed.

When we look through how the project was funded, it was fully funded by the province, and one would think, with the urgency—especially with one doctor for 2,000 patients, but, of course, many more residents in my riding with no doctor—that this would be an urgent process to move through. But it certainly was anything but a smooth process. Actually, it was almost like a circus. You take one step, you wait for approval, and you wait and you wait. The next step comes, and you wait again. The process was extremely long.

Of course, Ontario is a big province, but there's no question that common groups like these nurse practitioner clinics were all on the same—the first round was under way when the second one started, so you had about 20 of these that were under way. There was a lot of collaboration between them—“How are things going?”—and unfortunately, none of them were going well. So we would issue plans and wait.

It was interesting, because we had hired somebody in our riding who I guess was well suited to deal with the government—because it was quickly realized that most of the municipalities had provided seed money. Of course, the government knew that, so they were \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$300,000 in the hole, money they weren't supposed to provide, but there was no question that people wanted these clinics. That was just part of the strategy.

In our case, when you'd be waiting for approval, she would call up and say, “We're out of money. We'll wait until you approve it, but this is my last day of work.” Of course, the ministry, knowing that it would be a problem bringing things back up, knowing that the township was not going to fund more construction, would say, “Well, give us a day or two.” And lo and behold, money would appear.

Look at the time and the waste and the energy of building these clinics that, of course, the government was

very much promoting as being in a rush to put up. It took about a year and a half. In our case, we were the second clinic in Ontario, I believe, to be opened. When you consider that there were 10 that started the year before us, you can imagine the waste and the time put into this.

But one of the things we had to deal with was the choosing of electronic records. The province gave us a list of 10 or 15. We had to go out and hire a consultant to evaluate them, to choose them. One would think there would be a standardized system. But \$10,000 or \$15,000 later, the consultant comes back with his recommendation, which was required for the funding. We go and we put the system in place, and six months later, the company is bankrupt and we have to start all over again.

You can imagine the number of institutions in this province that were using the same eHealth records and had to start from scratch again, go out and purchase new software, put it in and do the training. That's just an example of when you don't have an integrated eHealth system. That's good governance, and we just don't see that here, and it's just money that's wasted and gone.

In my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, that's the biggest issue that we have. We want good governance, and good governance is efficient government that gets serious results for the money they put in. This is hard-earned money.

We have a rural area with farmers who are depending on the weather. They don't know what they're going to have from year to year. But they believe that a government should be able to have a procedure that's well documented so that they know what's happening. They're not dealing with the weather here. Putting records in, getting software development and IT—I mean, we just saw it with children's aid—another fiasco when it comes to IT—and it's just not showing a government that is showing much in the way of good governance.

When you go through this, it's just examples of waste with electronic records. BC has got a system, and they got it from the pharmacists. My understanding is that it was relatively free. So there are ways around it. There is off-the-shelf software. You don't have to build everything from scratch. I mean, if you look at project after project when it comes to IT, it's a failure with this government. So I don't think we want to get involved with anything to do with IT, because they just can't handle the projects.

I talked about my nurse practitioner clinic. Just after being elected here, back in 2012, we were called back because, if everybody remembers, in the summer we were having trouble with the teachers.

When I was on the board at the clinic, we had somewhere around 2,000 patients and a waiting list of about 800. There's still a waiting list today for our nurse practitioner clinic.

1740

I got a call from an agency in my riding saying that they were having problems with the clinic—“You better give them a call.” Now, one would wonder why it would come through an outside agent and not the clinic itself, but of course there's that fear with our institutions—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: A culture of fear.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —that if they bring something to light that is embarrassing the government, they'll be penalized.

This was a case in September, almost; it was the 30th of August. They hadn't received any funding since March 31—approved budget; bank account was empty. They were in the process of having to lay people off. They didn't want to do that because that would be very disruptive. When I talked to the executive director, he said, "We haven't paid our hydro bills. We haven't paid everything—we can't pay, but we have to pay our wages. We consulted a lawyer, and if we don't pay them, the board is responsible."

So I was on my way to question period and I sent a note across saying, "How could this be?" I understand half the clinics in Ontario are in the same boat, if you can believe it. This is a bill to deal with good governance, and I don't see anything about this. So the minister comes over and says, "What's the problem?" I said, "They're out of money and they're issuing layoff notices and I don't think you're going to want that because it's going to be in the papers." So the comment was, "Well, it's probably their fault." And I said, "Well, maybe it is, but it's going to be in the papers." Ten minutes later, they're back: "The cheque is in the mail."

You can imagine the amount of money—there are probably 15 or 20 people there—that was tied up for six months. Why wouldn't it be flowing with an approved budget? To think the information was that half the clinics in Ontario are in the same boat, and it's something that nobody wants to talk about because if they bring it up, there is that culture of fear, as our member from Nipissing says. That's what we see in this government. People are afraid to say anything because they are told that it could be worse next year.

To go back to our meeting with Jim Wilson, the member from Simcoe–Grey, last year, that was something that the various agencies told us. They were warned. That doesn't seem like good governance. I don't think that would be something that our government would be very proud of, and I'm sure the official opposition would be in the same boat, but we hear that time and time again.

But you look at the various issues they've had with this government—the gas plant cancellation. Billions of dollars wasted and all about—I mean the first comments were a mere few million dollars, as if a few million dollars is not a big deal. It only became apparent through our committee work after filibustering. I sit on a committee, where I sat just in June, where this government filibustered so we couldn't receive our subcommittee meeting minutes, because they didn't want us to question Hydro One. Now, I'm not sure what was so important to our committee. My colleague here, Mr. Pettapiece, sits with us; they didn't want us asking questions, so they filibustered and we ran out of time. What were they trying to hide? Is that good governance? I don't think so.

The same thing happened through the gas plants, where a deal over the budget allowed summer hearings. It's funny; you can't filibuster for eight hours. The com-

mittee was able to request these records, and we see the results. We're not sure really what was in these records. We got many records, no question, but the question is, what records didn't we get? When you look at how important it was for this government to ensure we didn't get this information—they prorogued the House, resignations; this was serious stuff. With a new leader in place, the first actions we see are more records deleted, more police investigations.

When we talk about good governance, I see a bill here and I really wonder what it's all about. It's another name. It's like two weeks ago when we were discussing the cessation of coal in power stations. We're not burning coal anymore. Have we not got more important legislation? We have 300,000 manufacturing jobs that have left this province and we're dealing with legislation that obviously is more around the title than it is the substance, unless there's legislation we don't know about that is going to burn more coal. That's something that we see all the time. It's all about substance, but we really don't see, in the end, anything that's really going to improve the situation in this province.

I look forward to more debate on this bill.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Indeed, it's another pleasure to stand in the House this afternoon and bring the concerns of the good residents in Windsor–Tecumseh to the attention of this House, and to make comments on those made by my good friend from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. I certainly enjoyed my time down in his part of the province at the plowing match this year. It was a great opportunity to see what was going on within the farming community.

I listened very intently to what the member had to say, Speaker. He talked about the police investigation and the Ornge air ambulance scandal. He talked about the scandal with eHealth. He talked about some issues that he had with a clinic in his riding. He also talked about the gas plant cancellation, that scandal that cost more than a billion dollars.

Bill 85 is to improve the way the government does its business. What's missing from this bill is wording to the effect that the government, in order to do its business better, will listen intently to what the opposition says, because there just might be a little kernel of something in there that they could use to learn a few things and that might improve the way the government does its business. But I don't see anything in this bill that's going to lead me in that direction.

Speaker, as you know, as you have heard many times in this chamber, there is no harm in admitting to a mistake. If someone makes a mistake, just stand up and say, "We're going in the wrong direction. We shouldn't be going there." So let's stop the sale of Hydro One. Let's stop the sale right now because 80% of the people in Ontario don't want it sold, including representatives of more than 175 municipalities. That's the way the government can improve the way it does its business around here.

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

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It's my pleasure, Speaker, to join my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh in this conversation about an important piece of legislation. It's always a pleasure to stand up and speak on behalf of the great citizens of Burlington, especially when it comes to legislation like this.

It's hard to figure why anybody would disagree with a set of legislative amendments that seek to improve government's effectiveness, and that's exactly what this bill purports to do. How can anyone quibble with legislation that really is housekeeping changes that bring existing statutes into line, if you will, and some of the—when I look at this bill, Speaker, some of the details include things like amendments to the Family Law Act that will ensure that the new administrative child support service is as effective as possible in assisting children to receive appropriate levels of financial support from their parents. To me, that sounds like an ultimately incredibly reasonable and smart thing to do.

One of the things that I love to do, as an MPP, when I'm meeting with my constituents, is help them understand how to better navigate government. It seems to me that a piece of legislation like this one that seeks to make our jobs easier—also to hold government to account—and to make us more effective in the exercise of our duties, is very good legislation indeed. So I am appreciating this opportunity to take part in the debate.

One of the other amendments, Speaker, that I noticed here was something called an amendment to the Courts of Justice Act that will help to effectively implement new federal family legislation in Ontario. Things like amending the City of Toronto Act—the proposed changes will make it easier for the TTC to expand their service to York region.

So, all in all, it's a clearing house of very important amendments to existing legislation, improving effectiveness.

I urge all members of the House to support this very important piece of legislation. It's a pleasure to speak to it, Speaker.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's a pleasure to be able to pick up on the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry's comments considering Bill 85, An Act to strengthen and improve government—I can tell you, Speaker, having led the gas plant scandal hearings for those many years, that there's a lot of improvement that the government can have.

1750

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You can hear the mumbling and grumbling from the other side, because they do not like to have the fact brought forward that good government involves being open and transparent with the people of Ontario.

I can tell you, Speaker, as I came in and spent my entire summer—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. I think sometimes there are some key words that sometimes have a tendency of hitting some hot buttons, and certainly those key words have hit some hot buttons. I would ask the members on the government side to do their best to refrain from allowing those hot buttons to be pushed, and as a result of that, I will now turn it back to the member from Nipissing to continue with your two-minute comments.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. As I talk about good government, I am reminded of the summer I had to spend here in the Legislature instead of with my constituents at home. I'm reminded of the entire winter I spent here on the gas plant scandal hearings, as opposed to with our stakeholders and constituents at home.

It's all about the time that the government told us they would bring all of the documents to the Legislature: "You have all the documents." That was 36,000 documents. If there was good government, you would realize that today we have 300,000 documents, so I guess maybe we didn't quite get all the documents when they swore—many of them under oath—that we have all the documents.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You were there every day, Vic.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Every day. From 36,000 documents the first time, two weeks later, it was, "Oops, we missed quite a few dozen boxes here. Here are 20,000 more documents." That brought us up to 56,000 documents. Now we're at 300,000—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I need to remind members, as well, that if you want to engage across the floor, that you must be sitting in your own seat. For that reason, just a gentle reminder right now. Thank you very much.

Back to the member, once again, from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Obviously, this is a government that knows nothing—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): A point of order: the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I was listening very intently to the member from Nipissing. Unfortunately, his last 20 or 30 seconds, I couldn't hear a word because of chatter from the other side. I wonder if you can roll back the clock so I hear what he had to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That's not a point of order, but I appreciate you bringing that forward. I'd like to say I can go back to the member from Nipissing; however, time has expired.

Further questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for his comments about this kind of clearing house bill that seeks to "improve"—that was the key word from the member

from Burlington. I don't know that it necessarily will improve or does improve, but when I go through the first few pieces and have a look at it—subsection 86.1 is to remove the requirement for the AG from the process of appointing a case management master who has reached the age of 65, 10 years after the fact when legislation was passed to allow people to work past age 65.

You would think that when the government is changing legislation, that they would look at the entire piece of legislation and other pieces of legislation that are impacted to—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A good government would do that.

Ms. Cindy Forster: A good government would do that, that's right, and they would actually address those kinds of issues.

The Provincial Offences Act allows documents to be filed with the court electronically. We have been in the electronic age for 20 years at least. I can remember 20 years ago they dropped a computer on my desk and said, "Learn how to use it." And yet we still can't file electronic documents around any of these areas that we're looking at in this legislation. Cancellation and suspension of driver's licences: We're now saying you can use courier, mail, fax and prescribed electronic means of transportation. So what is that? What does that mean? Can you text? Can you email? This is seeking to improve, but it's really not providing very much clarity when you actually get right down into the meat of the changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much to the member from Welland.

Now back to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for final comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I thank the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, Burlington, Nipissing and Welland.

Obviously, we touched some buttons. I noticed on the gas plant scandal that most of the chirping came from people who weren't here at the time. They're like the general public: They wouldn't know what happened because it seems to be all locked up in a vault somewhere. I know the OPP is still trying to find out just what records were deleted—illegally, I guess. The OPP investigation is going on. That's the type of good government that this government is talking about?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, second time.

Mr. Jim McDonell: We're looking at a government here that has done everything they can to make sure people don't find out. They talk about being transparent; it's anything but. And I think that—

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order—stop the clock. We have a point of order?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I would ask that the member opposite bring the topic back to the subject matter at hand. While we don't object to him taking it sideways, Speaker, I would ask that he stick to the matter at hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Burlington for bringing that to my attention. I have been listening attentively, and I believe that he is on course.

Back to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry to wrap it up.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Anybody who talks about a bill strengthening and improving government when they're in such a bad state is opening themselves up to criticism. I mean, one would have to laugh at the title here, because obviously, we're talking about trying to bring things into the electronic age. I don't disagree with them wanting to stay away from the electronic age, because when they touch IT projects, they cost billions and nothing comes out of them. Children's aid is the latest problem we've had with this government. So just stay away from that stuff because it just costs a lot of money.

The member for Nipissing talked about maybe what he considers a waste of time during the summer, but it certainly was important to the people of Ontario to know where these billions of dollars are being wasted. A government that tries to—I can't use the word "mislead" in this House, but it seems to me that when you talk about projects that are \$40 million but they're turning out to be billions, that's not transparent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

STEEL INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer to a question given today by the Minister of Finance. The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance will, in fact, fill in for the minister. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to ask some further questions about US Steel Canada's pensions, the health benefits and, as well, looking forward, the opportunity to restructure the plant and equipment that we have in both Hamilton and Lake Erie at Nanticoke.

Further to my question this morning, we know that, as of October 9, retirees and family members can no longer file claims for health, medical, prescriptions and dental insurance benefits as a result of the court decision.

On October 9, to their credit—and this is a start—the government of Ontario announced it was providing \$3 million for a transitional fund. The fund is intended to

help ensure that, over the next six months, retirees have support to address critical health needs and to help them transition to available programs, such as the Trillium Drug Program. The fund is administered with the support of both US Steel Canada and representatives of the union and salaried employees.

I've also been told that information sessions for retirees and their dependents will be organized to assist those who may qualify for the Trillium Drug Program. I will point out—I was given information—they don't need to wait for these information sessions. There's a 1-800 number that I've been giving out to a lot of former Stelco-US Steel people I've been speaking with. I'll read it into the record: 1-800-575-5386. If they have more questions, I have also been passing on the email: trillium@ontariodrugbenefit.ca.

1800

Ontario has announced a \$3-million transitional health benefit fund. However, across Haldimand-Norfolk, Niagara and the Hamilton area, we have something like 20,000 vulnerable retirees who are struggling with the grim reality that over the years they were asked to take pensions and pension increases in place of wage increases. As we collaborate on how best to support 20,000 US Steel Canada retirees, we can take a look at what this government has done before: Think of the auto industry. As a result of the 2009 recession, we all worked to support the auto industry. The Ontario government provided \$4.6 billion to bail out both GM and Chrysler and their pensioners. The federal government contributed \$9 billion; the US government contributed \$66 billion.

As I asked this morning, apart from supporting US Steel Canada's restructuring process and apart from the transition fund, what specifically will this government be offering to pensioners at US Steel Canada? And we know that in his answer, Minister Sousa threw blame at the federal government for not releasing details of the agreement.

Speaker, the reason I asked for this late show debate was to facilitate a more fulsome discussion of my supplementary question this morning; namely, just what are the plans and action steps being actively pursued in conjunction with this government's strategy to support Ontario's steel industry, more specifically the restructuring of US Steel?

Obviously, much uncertainty remains with respect to future courses of action. As I indicated this morning, Lake Erie Works employees are vigorously pursuing new orders, rooting out waste and inefficiency. The assets are in play: land, plant, equipment, in whole or in part for any available investment, for any bidders—valuable assets. The coke oven, hot strip mill, galvanizing line and large acreages at both Hamilton and Lake Erie Works are all worthy of investment: at US Steel Hamilton, something like 800 acres; there are thousands of acres down at the Lake Erie Works. They're in an excellent position geographically on the seaway—proximity to Toronto.

We know that bankruptcy proceedings are complete; the process can begin. We understand that some com-

panies could be interested. Again the question: What is this government doing to expedite the process? I refer specifically to the opportunities for restructuring.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I turn it back over now to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance for her comments.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to, first of all, apologize for my voice. It is not the best it's ever been. I'm battling a cold so, please, I hope that the member from Haldimand-Norfolk will bear with me, as well as whoever is watching at home, and you, obviously, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for pursuing this late show and for asking for more information. As he knows, although the court proceedings are still ongoing, our government remains committed to working with all stakeholders. Our goal is to achieve long-term viability of the Canadian operations, but more importantly to ensure the best possible outcome for employees, retirees, suppliers, customers and all interested parties in this matter.

While this effort is still ongoing, our government wants to ensure that over the next six months the retirees that the member from Haldimand-Norfolk spoke about have the support that they need to address critical health needs and to help them transition to available programs such as the Trillium Drug Program. To this end, the Ontario government is providing, as mentioned, \$3 million for the establishment of a transitional fund administered with the support of US Steel Canada and representatives of the union and the salaried employees. The fund is intended to help ensure that, over the next six months, the retirees have this critical support, especially towards their health needs.

Details of the fund will be made available shortly. However, the province is working closely with representatives of the union and salaried employees, on behalf of the retirees, the company and the monitor, to develop the program's parameters. As the restructuring continues, it is important to remember that the company is still operating and retirees are still receiving their pensions.

We are pleased with the developments that have taken place in the Court of Appeal with respect to the decision for the court to hear arguments on unsealing the federal government's secret agreement with US Steel. Throughout this process, our government has been at the table, working to help ensure the best possible outcome for the community and for all Ontarians. Our government's top concern—I repeat: top concern—has always been and continues to be for all employees, retirees and families who are affected by this situation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Haldimand-Norfolk and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance for their comments and responses.

It is now time for this House to adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1807.

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Grant Crack, Cheri DiNovo
Han Dong, Michael Harris
Sophie Kiwala, Todd Smith
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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Z. Milczyn
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Toby Barrett, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Peter Z. Milczyn, Daiene Vernile
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Joe Dickson, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Jim McDonnell, Eleanor McMahon
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

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Robert Bailey, Vic Dhillon
John Fraser, Wayne Gates
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
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Randy Hillier, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
Laurie Scott
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jack MacLaren
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Steve Clark
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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des comptes publics**

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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 / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
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Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Jennifer K. French
Monte Kwinter, Amrit Mangat
Kathryn McGarry, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Daiene Vernile, Bill Walker
Jeff Yurek
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**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
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Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Norm Miller
Jagmeet Singh, Peter Tabuns
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
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Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Sylvia Jones
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
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