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Tuesday 23 February 2016

Mardi 23 février 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 23 February 2016

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 23 février 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WASTE-FREE ONTARIO ACT, 2016

**LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT
UN ONTARIO SANS DÉCHETS**

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 18, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 and the Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2016 and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / *Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la récupération des ressources et l'économie circulaire et la Loi transitoire de 2016 sur le réacheminement des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.*

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As always, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in this Legislature today to speak on behalf of my constituents in Oshawa and discuss Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. I always look forward to what the government will title its next piece of legislation, and whenever I see that they have chosen something catchy like “Waste-Free Ontario Act,” I know that there will be some issues with it that they are hoping we somehow might overlook. We can all agree on the sentiment of creating a waste-free Ontario—at least, I hope that we can—but we want to make sure that it is more than just a sentiment and there’s actually some substance there as well.

To break things down a little further, what we’re talking about today is updating an outdated system that was introduced by the Waste Diversion Act, 2002. That legislation was originally introduced with the intention to promote the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste, but as we know, progress has stalled under the current legislation as compared to other jurisdictions within Canada. The Waste Diversion Act, 2002, established a system of industry-funded organizations and stewardships with the intention of reducing waste and improving resource recovery. Unfortunately, the approach that was taken has been unsuccessful and overhaul is long overdue.

The NDP has long urged greater individual producer responsibility to replace the current system, and this bill

allows for a transition to individual producer responsibility, though unfortunately it is vague in the details.

Before the government gets ahead of itself and officially declares Ontario waste-free, I will remind the chamber that this is merely enabling legislation. The success or failure of this act will depend on policies and regulations that have not yet been disclosed. As always with this government, the devil is in the details.

Despite its title, the Waste-Free Ontario Act has no legislated goal of a waste-free Ontario, although this bill does present a vision of the draft strategy. In fact, there is no timeline for when the transition to individual producer responsibility will be completed or even for when it will begin.

Speaker, I don’t want to be too cynical, as this bill does contain some positive steps forward, and on this side of the aisle we believe in giving credit where credit is due. But the government is also pretty good at congratulating itself and not quite so good at acknowledging its shortcomings, so somebody has to do it.

As I’ve already noted, we support building a waste-free Ontario, but we need to make sure that it is done right and it is done in a way that does not burden consumers or municipalities. That is difficult to guarantee when you’re dealing with legislation that leaves more questions than answers.

There are no timelines in this bill. Nothing changes, the day after this bill passes. Industry-funded organizations will still run our waste diversion programs and could keep running them for a long time. The NDP supports this bill’s promise of individual producer responsibility, but we will also seek amendments that guarantee that the government will actually follow through on their claimed goals for the bill.

I should also note that this is not the first we have heard about this change from the government. In fact, the government proposed individual producer responsibility back in 2008, and little has changed so far. Eight years seems like a long time to wait for legislation that only begins to establish a framework. But I am an optimist. We hope that the government has thought beyond the title of this legislation and is working diligently, as we speak, to address our concerns and the concerns of consumers and municipalities. If you really do intend to work toward a waste-free Ontario, then you need to get the details right from the start. I hope that you are consulting with stakeholders and experts before we end up in another misguided and poorly structured system for the next 13 years.

Enough of the platitudes; let's dive a little deeper into the legislation. On second thought, because this bill is more like a shallow pond, perhaps we will just wade in.

As I noted earlier, Bill 151 will open the door for a transition to a system of individual producer responsibility. Under individual producer responsibility, producers pay the full cost of the end-of-life management of their products and packaging, and are free to find creative ways to reduce waste. Under the existing system, however, both consumers and producers are trapped, and producers have no choice but to work with the stewardship monopolies. They have few incentives to find creative ways to reduce waste and packaging, and few incentives to improve the recoverability of their products. What happens to consumers? They get stuck with eco fees that simply pass on costs from producers without creating incentives toward better and more environmentally responsible packaging.

There are significant economic opportunities and environmental benefits from waste reduction, reuse and recycling, but progress is stalled under the current system. If and when we receive further disclosure from the government on what the actual details of this legislation will look like, we can then, hopefully, start moving toward a more results-driven approach.

What we see in the bill as it stands is that producers will be granted the flexibility to implement different solutions, as long as they fulfill provincial requirements. This means that competition and creativity will be encouraged, and we will all be better off for it. When you provide an organization with the right motivation, it is amazing what discoveries can be made. I hope that we will see, in the near future, a lot more packaging with labels that might say, "Now with 50% less plastic." A girl can dream, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, we are here talking about Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. We are here debating waste management. We've been talking about individual producer responsibility, and I will be going in depth into what I hope will be a new waste and waste-reduction framework that will address the concerns of municipalities across the province. However, I would be remiss if I didn't point out the fact that this is a government that knows all too well about waste.

Let's imagine a true waste-free Ontario, or rather a government-waste-free Ontario. Imagine what Ontario could look like if the Liberals hadn't wasted billions on scandals. Instead of Ornge, money could have been invested in infrastructure and transportation. Imagine the strength in public services and systems we might have had if the Liberals hadn't wasted heaps of money on eHealth. The government cancelled gas plants and, as a result, is now cancelling services and cutting home care and health care. If this government was able to manage its own waste, businesses and families across the province might still be able to afford their hydro bills and keep their lights on. But alas, Mr. Speaker, this government has instead laid waste the trust and money that Ontarians have given them, and now they are recklessly selling off Hydro One.

Government waste is piling up, and Ontarians are left to clean up the mess, time and time again. I know we can't turn back the clock or reclaim the billions of dollars the government has effectively incinerated, but as we move forward, I hope this government will indeed get a handle on its own waste management.

0910

But I digress. Let's talk about this new framework. We also hope that the new framework will address some of the concerns of municipalities, who share our concerns about legislation that is full of potential but thin on the details. For example, Bill 151 does not guarantee that municipal blue box costs will go down. The provincial government has already downloaded too many costs onto municipalities, and we want to make sure that this bill does not needlessly add to the burden on those municipalities. Municipalities have been burdened enough under the current system, and we want to make sure that some relief is on the way. For too long, they have seen costs shifted in their direction. Even with Bill 151, they are still looking at a transition period that may take three to five years. Don't forget, there is no timeline included for when the transition to individual producer responsibility will be completed, or even for when it will begin.

Ultimately, whether the changes will even be effective or not will depend on the regulations to come, and this is a big concern for municipalities as well. Unlike this Liberal government, municipalities like to think long-term, and it is pretty difficult to plan when the majority of the details are still to be determined. I hope that the government has listened to the concerns presented by those municipalities. I know that I'm not the first to outline these concerns to them, so hopefully repetition will be a powerful tool.

I know that my local municipality, the region of Durham, has shared its concerns with this legislation with the government, and since this government tends to need to hear things more than once, I am pleased to reiterate some of them today. I will start by reading an excerpt of a resolution that was sent to the Premier from the regional municipality of Durham earlier this month:

"Whereas waste materials can become valuable resources and enhanced producer responsibility could provide significant environmental benefits should producers be encouraged to innovate to reduce waste, develop more easily recycled packaging, and work with municipalities to enhance and/or fund enhanced options for the collection and processing of waste materials;

"Whereas municipalities have no control over the form of municipal solid waste generated from packaging and products entering their jurisdiction, and yet municipal taxpayers continue to bear greater than 50% of the costs for the disposal and recycling of packaging and print materials that circulate within their waste streams;

"Whereas producer responsibility provides that producers bear responsibility for 100% of the costs of designated wastes and their end-of-life management and municipalities should not bear any net cost for the management of these materials which are becoming increas-

ingly complex and expensive to recycle, reclaim and/or dispose of;

“Therefore be it resolved that the regional municipality of Durham calls on the Ontario government to ensure the proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act, Bill 151, results in legislation which not only replaces the current Waste Diversion Act to ensure full producer responsibility, but that in order to ensure service levels to Ontario residents are equal to or better than existing service levels provided.”

Speaker, as you can see, Durham region’s concerns are pretty clear and, as I understand, are shared by municipalities across the province. Basically, they want to ensure that producers are given the proper incentives to ensure that the legislation is actually effective and that municipalities, and subsequently the taxpayers they represent, are not left as the backstop for any grey areas or gaps in legislation.

It wouldn’t be the first time that this government has downloaded costs onto municipalities and left them to scramble to find the funds, so I think that their concerns are well founded. Just because you’ve gotten away with it in the past, though, doesn’t mean that you will forever.

Durham region has also expressed concerns with some of the ambiguity in the legislation, such as the lack of a legislated role for municipalities under the proposed act, meaning that “municipalities may find themselves negotiating with producers as service providers rather than having a predetermined, regulated role.” Durham stressed this concern further with the following request:

“While the province commits to continued collaboration, it is hoped the implementation of the Waste-Free Ontario Act and forthcoming detailed legislation and associated regulations will respect concerns already voiced by municipalities. A key concern highlighted is that the province needs to ensure the integrity of integrated municipal waste services and associated environmental benefits, while implementing a legislated full cost recovery framework for municipal waste services.”

This further supports our primary concern with Bill 151: It is just enabling legislation, and we want the details. Now I know that this government hates details. Details usually get this government in trouble and often result in some negative media coverage, and more recently in some OPP investigations. But details are important. They’re how we ensure that what you’re saying and what you’re doing align, and what should happen and what does happen are indeed one and the same. But for now, we wait. In the meantime, we hope that our concerns are heard, as are the concerns of municipalities across Ontario and all stakeholders that will be affected by this legislation. It’s not always knowing the most that’s important; sometimes, it’s knowing who knows the most that counts.

Just to summarize, I will include some of the concluding remarks, again from Durham region’s report:

“The impact of the province’s proposed legislation and regulations on municipal solid waste management program costs and property taxes remains unclear.

“Since the introduction of the existing Waste Diversion Act, 2002, municipal taxpayers have continued to fund the majority of the capital and operating costs for diversion programs (collection, processing, haulage marketing and disposal), as well as the operating and capital costs of residual garbage waste collection and disposal.

“Over the years, municipalities have created increasingly efficient waste systems that are integrated and include co-collection, commingled waste streams, long-term contracts with private sector partners, partnerships across municipal jurisdictions and vast investments in capital infrastructure.

“There are significant service and financial risks associated with potential waste program fragmentation, contractual obligations, additional administrative burden, and future direction related to existing capital assets or transfer station infrastructure. Stranded or underfunded assets and operations are a potential risk to municipalities and the municipal property taxpayers. Even under a fully funded blue box framework, costs for the integrated collection and processing of other waste streams, including organics and residual waste, would still be borne by municipalities.

“Any proposed changes to legislation must consider system-wide impacts to municipal cost structures and capital investments, including existing contracts and investments related to the current provincial funding regime, as well as other short- and long-term contracts between municipalities and the private sector related to the ongoing integrated collection, processing, haulage and disposal of municipal solid waste.”

While that might be a lot to digest, we do hope that the government is listening. Municipalities such as Durham region will be among the most affected by the legislation, so we hope the government recognizes the impact this will have and takes the time to get it right the first time.

While we’re pleased by the government’s interest in creating a waste-free Ontario, we remain perplexed by the inconsistencies and contradictions within their policies, such as trying to limit the amount of garbage that is created and yet send the remainder to the incinerators that the Ministry of Energy has a policy of supporting. There is an incinerator in the process of opening in Durham region, in fact, and while it met all the standards set out by the government of Ontario, it did not manage to meet the increased standards as established by the regional municipality. I applaud the region of Durham for recognizing that this government’s standards were too low and hope that they will take it as a sign that perhaps they need to take another look at their policies. But by all means, I’m sure that creating a truly waste-free Ontario is top priority.

Perhaps we should be accustomed to this government saying one thing today and then doing another by now, but the people of Ontario sent us here to hold this government accountable, and so we’re doing just that.

In conclusion, we appreciate the government’s intentions with this bill and hope to see the substance to follow. We’re all on board for reducing waste in Ontario,

but we want to make sure that it's done the right way and that the burden isn't passed on to consumers or municipalities. By putting incentives in the right place, we can make some really positive changes that will benefit everyone involved. That is why the NDP has long urged the government to pursue greater individual producer responsibility to replace the current system, and we hope that the regulations that follow this bill will continue to advance this purpose. Before the government gets ahead of itself and officially declares Ontario waste-free, I will once again remind the chamber that this is merely enabling legislation and the success or failure of this act will depend on policies and regulations that have yet to be disclosed. As always with this government, the devil is in the details.

0920

Speaker, I have appreciated the opportunity to speak to this bill today, to offer my thoughts and the thoughts of those who will be affected by this bill. I look forward to supporting this legislation and hope that the regulations actually do help us to reach the goal of a waste-free Ontario.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Oshawa. The member from Oshawa said in her remarks that it's enabling legislation and that there is no substance in that. I don't agree with that. Actually, there is a lot of substance in Bill 151. If this proposed legislation is passed, it would provide Ontario households with environmental as well as economic benefits. The proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act would help us reach our greenhouse gas reduction targets and achieve the goals in our climate change strategy.

Ontario currently avoids adding 2.2 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to our air every year through our waste diversion programs. It is like taking almost half a million cars off the road each year. With our proposed legislation, we would be able to reduce our emissions from waste further.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member from Oshawa said that there is no benefit to the municipalities. I don't agree with that. Actually, since the cost of the end-of-life product is shifting to the producer rather than the municipal taxpayer, it would improve the sustainability of municipal services. The municipalities will save more than \$100 million annually, and they will realize further additional savings as more materials are designated for new producer responsibility, such as fluorescent tubes and bulbs, bulky materials, furniture, mattresses etc.

Actually, I was reading a newsletter, the winter newsletter from the OFA. They are also supportive of the concept, and in this newsletter they said, "As a replacement to the current Waste Diversion Act, OFA supports the objective of the new act to reduce waste and the province's dependence on landfills that are typically in rural areas."

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to contribute to the debate on waste-free Ontario. I appreciated the comments that we received from the member from Oshawa and how tuned in she is to her municipality. I have to agree with her that one of the concerns we've heard over and over again from stakeholders is specifically the vagueness of Bill 151. We have to ensure that municipalities across the province are at the table and are partners in how we move forward in ensuring that Ontario continues to increase its diversion rate, because I have to point out to the people listening today that unfortunately, over the last number of years, which coincide with the number of years that the Liberals have formed government, waste diversion has stalled here in Ontario. They have a dismal record and stalled out at 25%.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that their last attempt, Bill 91, was an absolute, complete failure. It's only by embracing the good ideas from the Ontario PC plan that they have been able to move forward with Bill 151. But we do have concerns, Speaker. We hope that we can work and drill down in committee to improve Bill 151. We want to see eco tax programs scrapped: Ontario Tire Stewardship, e-waste and also Orange Drop. We have to make sure that WDO is actually scrapped, not just slid into this new authority.

Speaking of the authority, that's where many stakeholders have concerns again. We know how this government works and we see it again in Bill 151. The minister appoints the first five members, and then his hand-picked crew selects the remaining six. Stakeholders are very nervous about that. This government has to do better.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: As the member from Oshawa said, the titles of bills really kind of pre-empt what the expectations are of what the legislation might look like. When you talk about "waste-free," there is the notion that this government is on board: "100% recycling, we're not going to have any environmental issues, everything is going to be waste-free; we're on board." But really, Speaker, it's disappointing.

It really is disappointing because this bill doesn't have any meat on the bones. There's no substance to the title. We're still waiting for those regulations. We're still waiting for those policies. It leaves people hanging. It leaves stakeholders hanging. It leaves community members hanging. It leaves environmentalists hanging. It leaves municipalities hanging. What is this bill going to actually do? What kind of productive legislation is going to help the environment? We don't know what it looks like.

You're telling us to trust you, to trust this government to make this legislation effective enough that it will meet the expectations of what the bill represents: waste-free Ontario. Frankly, Speaker, there's not a lot of trust out there nowadays in this government. They're rushing legislation through all the time.

One perfect example: We had Cheri DiNovo, the member from Parkdale-High Park, talking for eight years

about post-traumatic stress disorder. What a great bill that was; what a difference that made to people. Just recently, the government took that idea and put it into legislation. Well, they need to take our ideas now, Speaker, not eight years later. When the bills are being discussed on a current basis, the ideas and the feedback need to be pertinent to the day it's happening, not eight years after the fact.

Speaker, I hope when this legislation goes to committee that this government will actually pay attention to the deputants and will implement their suggestions, so that it will become a waste-free Ontario for the legislation that they are creating today.

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

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act, 2015. Ontario is showing leadership when it comes to the environment and this is a perfect example of that, because this is about creating a waste-free Ontario. Let me tell you, here is the reality: Ontarians generate nearly 12 million tonnes of waste each year and on average each Ontarian generates 2.3 kilograms of waste materials a day.

Here's another fact: Ontario's overall waste diversion rate has remained at around 25% over the past decade. In addition, about 47% of Ontario's residential waste is diverted from disposal; however, the diversion rate in the institutional, commercial and institutional sectors continues to be low, just 13%.

So, what are we going to do? Here's what we're going to do: We have come up with a strategy for a waste-free Ontario. The proposed legislation requires the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to develop and maintain the Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy strategy. This strategy was developed in response to what we heard from people out there and across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I often get people coming into my constituency office who are talking about the environment and talking about the need for Ontario to have clear goals that support our circular economy. In fact, just a few weeks ago, members of my community came out and spoke to me about this. They talked about the need to take action when it comes to increased diversion and the need to measure our progress in achieving goals. That's what this proposal does.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, it's not just the people coming off the streets or the constituents. It's my friends; it's my neighbours. It's my kids—my kids sitting at the dinner table, making sure that they are directing me when I'm putting things in the trash, into the right blue box, into the green box, into the right places that it should go. So this bill is good for the economy, good for the environment and good for our children. I think it's the right thing to do.

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

0930

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to respond to the thoughtful questions and comments of my colleagues around the Legislature this fine morning on waste management.

To the member from Mississauga–Brampton South: She was saying I had claimed that there is no benefit to the municipalities. Well, I didn't claim that, and I'm certainly hoping that that will not be the case. We want to see the details. We want to see the timelines. We want to see that all of the consultations that they've allegedly had with the municipality are not falling on deaf ears. We look forward to seeing the benefit to the municipalities. We look forward to finding out the details.

To the member from Huron–Bruce, who talked about listening to communities and their concerns, and the vagueness of this bill: As I had mentioned before, this is enabling legislation. As we heard from the member from London–Fanshawe, there isn't meat on the bones of this yet. But back to the member from Huron–Bruce, who had talked about the waste diversion rate that has stalled out and what makes stakeholders nervous: I think it's the same thing that we see across the province. What makes stakeholders nervous is wondering whether or not they're being heard, crossing their fingers that their input is indeed being heeded and that the legislation that they are going to have to live with and work with is going to address their concerns, and is going to actually make the world a better place—to actually see this waste-free Ontario.

My colleague from London–Fanshawe: Thank you for your comments. As you said, "waste-free" is a bit of a misnomer, because this is a bill that sort of lays out a strategy or a framework, but it doesn't give us the timelines, doesn't give us the deadlines and doesn't give us the stuff of the bill, so we don't know what it's going to look like. As she mentioned, there's not a lot of trust in this. I talked about reducing government waste, while we're talking about actual waste. I think that the trust and money of the people of Ontario have been laid to waste with reckless abandon, and that's a shame.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: I don't know if the members opposite have looked at the bill, but it's Bill 151. I suggest they take a good read of the bill. I've tried to go through it all. It is quite complex. There are over 100 pages with incredible detail. When I hear them talk about the fact that there's no meat on the bone—I mean, I just don't know whether I've seen a more complex bill.

Maybe they could say that it's an omnibus bill, but it is very detailed with a lot of direction—everything from industry stewardship to the Brewers Retail recycling program, to this authority they are creating, to the continuation of industry funding organizations. It's a very comprehensive bill that requires a lot of work. That's why I think it's important for all members to read the bill, and to look at the implications of it. Hopefully, when they come to committee, they'll be able to better understand it.

With waste reduction, the thing about it is that the members opposite always get hung up on titles. They read the title, and then they don't go into the rest of the bill. This bill deals with a subject that all of us are very involved in. It's a subject, basically, that government tries to set direction for, but it requires the co-operation of all Ontarians. It requires the co-operation of all major industries. It involves the local municipalities, first-tier and second-tier. It is something that involves everyone from Kenora to Cornwall in many different aspects, because all homes, industries and entities create waste.

The basic focus of this bill is to ensure that the waste isn't reduced downstream, but that there's an upstream strategy to reduce waste. That comes from the producers. We see too much—I'm sure you've seen it, Mr. Speaker—that the producers will constantly put forward this excessive packaging. You've seen it in everything from cereal boxes, to buying appliances, to buying furniture. The packaging is overwhelming. You get the product, and the product may be of use to you, but the packaging, what happens to it? Subsequently, that packaging creates an incredible amount of waste that has to go somewhere. This bill tries to ensure that there are strategies in place which reduce the upstream packaging that essentially costs hundreds of millions of dollars every year to deal with.

There's also a huge environmental cost of reducing the packaging, eliminating the packaging—if you don't do it. There are huge impacts in terms of the environment because some of this waste ends up in landfills—massive landfills. At one time in Toronto we used to truck our waste all the way to Dearborn, Michigan. Remember that? They were going by Chatham-Kent, I'm sure. Day after day, thousands of trucks would go with Toronto's household garbage and end up in Michigan. That's because people were really not able to develop a strategy of reducing waste here at home in the GTA to ensure we didn't export, at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, garbage to Michigan. We still, unfortunately, use these landfills, and those landfills cannot continue forever.

That's why the emphasis here is to try to get people to play their role, try to get producers to play their role and be cognizant of it. For instance, the shopping that takes place: Why buy all this food in boxes, containers? Imagine all the pizza boxes. Why do you have these two-inch-thick pizza boxes? There are about a half a million pizzas sold every week in Toronto, I know, so where do these boxes go? They go into landfills.

Do we always have to have all of our morning cereal in these boxes? You've seen the boxes, Mr. Speaker. There's about half a box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes in a huge container that is almost too big. That's a perfect example of the overpackaging that takes place all the time. Overpackaging ends up in a cost to the consumers, ends up in a cost to the municipalities and ends in a cost to the environment. We must reduce packaging.

One successful recycling program that this bill reinforces is the recycling program that occurs with our

Beer Stores. If you know, Mr. Speaker, before, you could take your bottles of wine and alcohol and put them in your blue box and they would contaminate the Blue Box Program. Now people can take their used beer bottles, plus wine bottles, back to the Beer Store and get money back for them. That has proven to be very successful and it's an example of how, if people co-operate, there's a cost saving and there's an environmental saving. So that's been a great success. In fact, it's almost impossible nowadays to find an old beer can, beer bottle or wine bottle on the streets of Toronto and the GTA because there's such an effective, aggressive recycling program that is in place with the Beer Stores.

In terms of the cost of this, one of the members talked about downloading or whatever. Since this government came to power, we have uploaded over \$2 billion to the provincial government that used to be on the municipal governments. We've uploaded the cost of land ambulance, some of the welfare costs, some of the roads that were downloaded on the municipalities—we are no longer downloading highways to the municipalities—and this has been able to give municipalities more room to do what they do best without the provincial government downloading on municipalities. This has stopped.

Again, \$2 billion has been uploaded to the provincial government off the local taxpayer, to their benefit. This is something that, again, was created by the existing mayor of Ottawa. Remember, Jim Watson fought for this uploading that has been very beneficial to municipalities.

0940

This bill ultimately, as much as it deals with the municipalities and different industries, deals with the responsibility all individuals have in terms of reducing waste and ensuring that there is a comprehensive program that deals with waste. Because if you don't have this comprehensive program that's laid out in this bill, you will not reach your targets. Our targets, actually, have stalled, and that's where I think our government and other governments have not done a good enough job. Right now, we only divert about 25%—we recycle 25%. That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. We've got to get that up there into the 50% range. It is not easy; it's easier said than done. But these are the targets that we must aggressively pursue to reduce the impact of all this waste on our economy, our environment, and on the cost that individual taxpayers have to bear.

I think it is going to be a very challenging task to implement this bill. It's not easy because, as I said, it touches on a multitude of areas which are very complex, which are very detailed, and which require the co-operation of a lot of partners, a lot of various stakeholders and individuals. So there is a great deal of work to be done. This bill sets up a very aggressive framework for reducing waste and meeting our recycling goals.

I remember when the Blue Box Program first came out. People were, in some cases, reluctant to use it. In some cases, they said, "Well, this isn't something that's of any value." But, as you know, the blue box has become very accepted, it's a norm, as is now the green bin

we have. These are programs that remind us every day that we must not use all the packaging. We must ask our vendors, when we go buy something, “Why do I need this huge box to buy my morning breakfast?” We must stop eating out of our boxes, we must stop eating out of our cans and we must stop buying things with massive packages. There’s no reason why we can’t reduce that. As consumers, we have a role to play in that.

We as consumers and as members of the Legislature, and the Ministry of the Environment, with all the partners and the business community, we all have a stake in this. It’s going to be ultimately a cost saving if we reach these recycling goals and reduce waste. It’s good for everybody, and as much as Canada does a great job and Ontario is doing a reasonable job, we have to really step up our game. We must ensure that those trucks don’t go down the 401 to London anymore. We must reduce at source as best we can, and be good environmental citizens. This bill will at least help to encourage us to get to that goal.

I’m sharing my time with the President of the Treasury Board; if she could finish off, I would appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’m delighted to speak to this bill. When we are dealing with a bill, I always like to understand what the problem is that we’re trying to solve. The problem is very clear on this: We are wasting on average 2.3 kilograms of waste every day. That’s how much each one of us puts into landfills on average: 2.3 kilograms a day. That is just way too much, so we have to take steps to reduce the amount of waste we put into landfills.

We have to increase the diversion rate. We’ve been stalled at a 25% diversion rate for about a decade, so we need to take action to get more waste recycled, to reduce the amount of waste that’s being produced. We have a particular challenge in the ICI sector, the industrial, commercial and institutional sector. Their diversion rate is a dismal 13%, so we know there’s terrific opportunity to do more.

I have to tell you, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence talks about the trucks going down Highway 401 to London, taking Toronto’s garbage to London. I have to say, I drive down that 401 frequently—as do you, Speaker—and when I see those trucks going down to landfills in London, I can’t say I’m happy about it. So we can reduce the amount going to landfill. Our landfills have less than 20 years of life left in them. What that means is we’re going to have to take more land to create more landfill sites if we don’t take the action we must take now.

There’s also a huge opportunity here. If we just increased our diversion rate to 60%, we could create 13,000 jobs. There are jobs in waste diversion and recycling. We’re tossing out about a billion dollars a year; a billion dollars’ worth of value is being thrown into landfills when we could actually take advantage of that and put people to work. It’s good for the environment. It’s

good for the economy. It creates jobs. This is actually action that I can’t imagine anyone in this House would not support.

It’s built on a strategy that—I’m actually a bit disappointed when I hear people questioning whether we’ve listened, whether we built the foundation behind this bill. We absolutely have. One of the things I like best about this strategy is that it actually includes a set of performance measures, so we will know what is working and where improvements need to be made. The proposed legislation would require the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to prepare progress reports at least every five years, outlining what we’ve done to achieve this strategy’s goals, and then every 10 years, we would take a look at this strategy and refine it, because we know that opportunities are being created every day to reduce the amount of waste we put into landfills.

I think every one of us has had the experience where we’ve purchased something, we get it home, we unpack it, we look at the product and then we look at the packaging, and the packaging is way bigger than the product. We actually have to hold somebody accountable for that. We believe the producer should be responsible for limiting the amount of landfill waste created from their products. So that principle of producer responsibility is embedded and fundamental to this bill and to this strategy.

We are serious about reducing landfill waste. As I say, many of our communities have landfill sites. They are getting fuller. We do not want to see more good agricultural land being consumed by garbage that doesn’t need to be put into landfills. In my community, and I think in other communities as well, we’ve got some organizations that are doing fantastic work when it comes to recycling waste. We’ve got a terrific organization that puts people to work, that takes waste particularly from construction sites and sorts it, and then can resell it to people who want that kind of product. It’s really a virtuous cycle. It creates that circular economy where we truly could become a zero-waste province, and that’s the aspiration behind this piece of legislation.

I applaud the people who are activists on this front. I think a lot of us learn from our kids—certainly I’m one who learns more from my kids than I could ever teach them. My son is a particular champion of the environment. He’s actually made that his life’s work, working to create a better planet, and I really admire him for that. This is something that he’s been talking about for a long time: companies that actually create products that are designed for that full life cycle. They think about when the product has served out its useful life and how it then can become another product. It can be recycled into another useful product, sending nothing to landfill. There are carpet companies that do that; there are furniture companies that do that. There are a number of companies that actually have created jobs, have created employment, and are working to make a better planet.

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This legislation, I think, addresses a very real and immediate problem. It’s backed by a strategy that will

actually drive the change we aspire to. We will get reports back every five years to see how we are doing. We will revisit the strategy every 10 years to make sure that we're taking full advantage of the technology that's there.

The important thing is that the responsibility for waste diversion will rest with the producer of the product that we buy. The next time you purchase something and it comes in a huge box with Styrofoam and you open it all up and you find inside there's just a small, little product, you can think about how we are going to actually reduce the amount of packaging and recycle the packaging that must be there to keep that product from breaking as it works its way through the system.

I'm proud of this legislation. I think the minister has developed the right piece of legislation. I think that all of us owe it to our kids to look at this very seriously because the landfill we're creating is going to be something they're going to have to live with for a long time. Let's think of the future as we think about this bill. Let's work to make it the best it can possibly be.

Let's actually remember that we're not just going to pass this bill and it's going to be done. Every five years there will be a report back. Every 10 years we'll revise the strategy. We'll have performance metrics so we'll know if we're achieving the goals or not.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to respond to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and the Deputy Premier. She used the word—not me—“aspirational.” That's wonderful, but here we are 10 years later and she said herself that we peaked at 25% about 10 years ago and have made no advancements ever since. Here is the government, in 2016, bringing forward a new Waste Diversion Act that they're going to review in 10 years. Well, in 10 years, if we're sitting in the same numbers, where we're getting 25% of our products diverted from landfills, then we won't have accomplished anything.

I understand they're putting the onus on the manufacturers, but make no mistake about it, Speaker: Whatever manufacturers do, whatever producers do, the cost will end up being borne by the consumer. They're not going to bear the cost; the cost will be borne by the consumer. They're not in the business to lose money; they're in the business to make money, market products, and at the end of the day, the consumer will have to pay for what allows both of those things to happen.

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence brought up some examples, and there are some good examples. When I buy razor blades, I think, “My God, I've got these little razor blades and I've got enough blister packs to—” It just boggles my mind. By the time I get into the razor blades, I need a knife to hack open the package and everything. There you are: You've got these 16 razor blades with enough packaging to fill a plastic bag on its own.

But then he brings up the example of pizza boxes. That's not going to change. People are not going to be

picking up pizzas without a box. Would you like to see the mess in the front seat of your car? The boxless pizza just doesn't have a future. I say this to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: The boxless pizza only has a future if you're baking it at home, my friend.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you for the questions and comments. The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's always a pleasure to rise and bring the voice of my constituents from Windsor West to the debate. I just want to speak firstly to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. He spoke about excessive packaging, and we just heard from a member of the PC caucus about pizza and how we certainly aren't going to see pizzas being delivered or picked up any time soon without packaging.

But what we do see often from this government is excessive packaging of bills, omnibus bills. We find a mishmash of items or topics all rolled into one bill with a really great title. The member talked about us getting hung up on titles, but they have some grand titles that, when you go through the bill, really have nothing to do with many of the items in the bill. I think it's interesting that the member is talking about excessive packaging and reducing that, and I certainly hope we'll see that from the government side in the future when they bring their omnibus bills forward.

The President of the Treasury Board also talked about packaging, and made the comment that packaging is way bigger than the product. Again, I go back to many of the bills that the government side brings forward, their omnibus bills, where the packaging of the bill is much bigger than the content of the bill. I think we're finding that again in this bill about a waste-free Ontario.

We need to make sure that municipalities have a lot of information on how this is going to affect them. The other side talked about consultation with municipalities and how they listened, but my father-in-law has a saying: “Just because we have spoken, it doesn't mean we've communicated.” We find that often on the government side, such as with the budget. They've done budget consultations right to the beginning of February; fast-forward two weeks, and they're announcing that a week down the road they have a budget they're presenting. I'm not sure how you can put a really thoughtful, fulsome budget together, taking into consideration consultation with the people of Ontario, and do that in three weeks.

I hope that the government side will take their own advice and really start listening to the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: York South–Weston.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to add my voice to the conversation this morning. The bill is entitled the Waste-Free Ontario Act, building a circular economy.

We think: What is a circular economy? We're trying to support the system to create a system where nothing is wasted and valuable materials can be recovered. Why? If we continue to produce so much waste at this rate, there will be not enough land for agriculture, and we value our farms in Ontario. We value the food that grows here locally. We value the future of our kids, of our grandkids.

There's been a lot of discussion this morning, for example, on excessive packaging, and one of my pet peeves is the way toys are packaged. There are a lot of cartons, there are all these little wires—you buy something that could be very small, but just to take it out of the package takes a lot of work. You don't have to go through all of that. The goal is to create an incentive for the producers to produce something that is less cumbersome for the consumer, and better for the environment.

Yes, we spoke about pizza boxes. Well, 45% of Ontario's waste is created by paper and by cartons. This is why we speak about pizza boxes. Why can't the producers come up with a better, maybe less thick carton? You have to incentivize the producer. I heard one member on the other side say that it is about consumer choice. But it's also about everyone's responsibility. We all have a responsibility for a better world.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I was very interested in what the member from Eglinton–Lawrence as well as the Deputy Premier had to say. One comment that the President of the Treasury Board, the Deputy Premier, shared with us is that they had been wondering what the problem they're trying to solve is. That stuck with me, because industry and—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, honestly. Specifically, she said, "What the problem is that we're trying to solve," and she referenced that. I just immediately went to municipalities, I immediately went to stakeholder meetings, when we heard time and again that the problem is that this government, during its reign, has stalled waste diversion at 25%, primarily because they get too involved, there's too much red tape. As we go forward, we need to ensure that waste diversion in Ontario succeeds. How are we going to ensure that? We need to get government out of the way. We need industry to come forward and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead in terms of the circular economy that was referenced earlier.

But how are we going to get the government out of the way? Very simply, the PC plan would have the government set targets, set standards and then let industry innovate and let industry lead in terms of how we can embrace that circular notion. But it's important to recognize that, as we move forward, we need to ensure that nobody's left holding the proverbial bag. One thing that the PC Party of Ontario is committed to is that when we're talking about the blue box specifically, municipalities are at the table. In terms of determining the best way forward, we need to have our producers and municipalities, together, addressing how to move forward with the

blue box so that, again, nobody is caught bearing the cost of previous government mismanagement.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I return back to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for final comments.

Mr. Mike Colle: I think the pizza box reference is very much a symbol of all this waste and packaging. It's too bad that some people don't want to look at alternatives. But, like the pizza box and other packaging issues, there are answers. In many countries in the world, when you buy a pizza, they put it in a paper bag. They don't give you a box. I know it's going to be a nervous breakdown for some members opposite if they don't get their box, but you can actually get your pizza in a paper bag and take it home safely, so don't panic. There is an answer to your pizza box dilemma.

I want to thank the members from Renfrew, Windsor West, York South–Weston and Huron–Bruce and the Deputy Premier for their comments. I'm surprised the Conservatives always do this. This is not something that government can do to you. This is something that everybody has to do together. You can't blame the municipalities. You can't blame industries. You can't blame the householder. We all, together, have to have this imperative to reduce waste. We can only do it if everybody is part of the solution, and not pointing fingers and blaming.

I think what has happened in recent years is that we've taken it for granted, just because we see the blue box outside and the green bin. We've forgotten that we must be more aggressive in reducing waste. So maybe this is a wakeup call, this bill. I hope it is. It touches a lot of areas, and it tries to get everybody on board in terms of that goal because, eventually, it's going to save money, and it's going to create jobs. If we sell it that way, maybe that's the way we'll get more partners on board.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I only want to say one thing about pizza boxes, and then I hope we stop talking about it. If you live in the town of Caledon, your pizza box can actually go in your green bin. It is recycled in the town of Caledon.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mine too, in Simcoe.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Okay. On that note, I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act. There is clearly a need for a new waste diversion policy in Ontario. Our province's diversion rate, as has already been mentioned by numerous speakers, has been stalled for the last number of years at 25%.

However, as I just mentioned the town of Caledon, I want to talk about some of the good things that are happening in the riding of Dufferin–Caledon regarding waste diversion. In 2013, Dufferin county's waste diversion rate was 53.7%. It was ranked third among a group of 15 similarly sized municipalities. The success that had been achieved in Dufferin county is due in large part by the program that has been instituted, which of course we all recognize as the Blue Box Program.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize my former boss and federal counterpart MP David Tilson, who, throughout his career when he was a municipal representative, was one of the original founders of the Blue Box Program in Orangeville.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the great work at Blue Mountain Plastics, located in my riding in the town of Shelburne. Blue Mountain Plastics is a state-of-the-art plastics recycling facility that purchases mixed plastic bales and other forms of unrefined plastics from municipal recycling programs and businesses. They process these plastics and sort them by type and colour of plastic, and then produce pellets from the food-grade plastic which can be used to produce new food-grade containers and 100% recycled blue and green bottles. It's efforts like this that have gone a long way to make Dufferin-Caledon an environmental leader in the province.

Unfortunately, though, this type of success has not been achieved by the provincial numbers. When this government first came to power, our province's waste diversion rate was, as we mentioned, 25%. In 2014, they promised to increase the diversion rate to 60% by 2018. Yet somehow, we've been stuck at 25% for over a decade. It's very disappointing.

Many in the industry have long been calling for changes to our province's waste diversion policies. Unfortunately, the government has failed to answer these calls for action. Now the government has brought forward this new piece of legislation that has borrowed some of the ideas brought forward by the PC caucus in 2012. However, there are still a number of issues with Bill 151 that are not reflective of what my caucus brought forward. These problems that I will speak to in more detail later are being met with opposition from those in the industry and must be addressed if we are to make Ontario an environmental leader.

I'd like to spend some time going over some areas of concern regarding Bill 151. The second schedule of Bill 151 enacts the Waste Diversion Transition Act, which would replace the current Waste Diversion Act to facilitate the windup of existing recycling programs and industry-funded organizations such as the Ontario Electronic Stewardship, the Ontario Tire Stewardship and Stewardship Ontario.

It's important to mention here the failures of the government's Ontario Tire Stewardship program because, of course, we've all been reading about those in the news recently. Earlier this year, we learned that Ontario Tire Stewardship, whose job was supposed to be recycling the province's used tires, wasted thousands of dollars that the agency collects from car and truck drivers for a recycling fee on things like wine tastings, meals at fine restaurants, boat cruises, luxury hotels and even donations to the Ontario Liberal Party. In one example, \$16,000 was spent for a three-day board meeting at the Fairmont Château Laurier in Ottawa. In light of this, auditors are investigating Ontario Tire Stewardship, and no doubt we will learn more. The money the tire stewardship collects is supposed to fund the agency's operations, not wine tours and dinners.

This government has once again proven they cannot manage the province's third-party agencies. Allowing an organization that this government created to irresponsibly waste taxpayer dollars is unacceptable. Ontarians are already struggling to pay their skyrocketing hydro bills and put food on the table; they should not be on the hook for excessive spending at OTS.

The government has a responsibility to ensure appropriate oversights so that Ontario Tire Stewardship uses these funds to stick to their mandate and keep Ontario environmentally sound. This government cannot allow this kind of unchecked spending across its agencies, boards and commissions, and should immediately be conducting cost-for-value assessments. Sadly, this government has a long track record of scandal and wasteful spending. Whether it's Ornge, eHealth, cancelled gas plants or the Sudbury by-election, the list never seems to end.

It's worrisome that under section 14 of the Waste Diversion Transition Act, it is optional for the government to wind up the government's eco tax programs such as the E-Waste Program, the Used Tires Program and the Orange Drop Program. These eco tax programs have unfairly increased costs for Ontarians while failing to make any meaningful change in the province's overall diversion rate.

The PC caucus has been clear that the government's eco tax programs must be abolished, which is why in 2012, we put forward a plan that would dismantle every single eco tax program. However, we cannot trust this government to phase out these eco tax programs when in Bill 151, it is an option. That is why it's imperative that we have a clear, legislated timeline to eliminate each of these eco tax programs. We need assurances that these eco tax programs will be eliminated now, not sometime down the road when they continue to take money away from hard-working Ontarians.

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Another area of concern I have with Bill 151 are changes made to Waste Diversion Ontario. Under part III of the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, Waste Diversion Ontario will be renamed the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority—I guess that's the "reuse" part of reduce, reuse and recycle—and given extensive new powers and an unlimited budget. The authority would set and impose fees on brand holders to pay for its operations.

What's concerning about this new authority is that much of the mandate of the new authority will be left to regulations. Speaker, you know that I have spoken many times on my concerns with leaving so much of the detail in legislation to regulation. As I've said before, a regulation can be made within days. Three cabinet ministers have to sign it; it doesn't even have to go to the full cabinet, let alone coming to the legislative chamber, where we as legislators get an opportunity to debate it.

When I read so much of Bill 151 talking about "by regulation," "enforced through regulation," it concerns me greatly. I have seen bills change completely when the

regulations are actually put in place, and the implications without consultation, without input from legislators or stakeholders. I have a lot of concern with that authority and how much of the mandate will be left to regulation. This government continues to leave things to regulation instead of fleshing it out in legislation so that we can have a proper debate.

In addition to its vague mandate, the new authority would be given a blank cheque in terms of spending. The ministry has not provided an estimate of how much this new authority will cost Ontarians. This is concerning as it could waste millions of Ontarians' hard-earned money, considering that Waste Diversion Ontario's current budget is \$3.2 million, a \$1-million increase from what was there previously. Yet approximately a third of its budget is going to professional fees, not to actually helping improve diversion rates.

This is the same story we have heard from the government's community care access centres. In last year's auditor's report on CCACs, she found that 41% of the CCAC's \$2.4-billion budget went to administrative costs. That means almost half of the money CCACs spent did not go anywhere near front-line care.

In my office, I hear from Dufferin-Caledon residents who have been denied services or have had their services severely reduced by the Central West CCAC. I regularly raise the issue of service cuts and reductions with the minister and highlight the inability of residents to access care when they or their family members need it. While the Central West CCAC continues to claim it is forced to limit its caseload because of a lack of funds, the CEO's salary has more than doubled between 2009 and 2014 to \$271,000.

As a result of cutbacks, patients have had to make tough choices, and have had to rely on help from family members or friends for paying for additional private care. I know of several individuals who chose to move out of Dufferin-Caledon into a different part of the province where the services they needed were available through another CCAC. This is unacceptable.

Instead of giving this new authority a blank cheque, it should look at ways of utilizing the money it already has.

Also of concern is the fact that section 47 of the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act sets out to create a new force of inspectors for the new authority to enforce the requirements for brand holders, including reporting costs and recycling levels. If brand holders fail to meet these requirements, an inspector can seize documents and issue fines.

Yet the fact is that the Ministry of the Environment already has an enforcement branch whose duty it is to ensure that everyone is compliant with MOE rules. Now this government is creating yet another layer of bureaucracy and duplication of service. This is not what is needed to help improve waste diversion in Ontario.

Instead of allowing industry to find the best methods to improve waste diversion, this government is chaining them down with more layers of bureaucracy, which is only doing them a disservice. Our caucus was very clear

in 2012 that all enforcement should be managed by the Ministry of the Environment, not another authority.

I understand that my time is wrapping up. I have a number of other issues that I would like to raise regarding Bill 151. I would like to acknowledge the hard work that our critic has done. The member from Huron-Bruce has given us a lot of information, and I really appreciate her assistance on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. You will be allowed to continue debate at a more appropriate time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since it is now 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm not sure if they're in the chamber yet, but I'd like to welcome Jeff Koller, Jodi Travers and Randy Prot from the Progressive Certified Trades Coalition here today.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure this morning to introduce, in the west members' gallery, members of the Consular Spouses Association of Toronto. Visiting us here today are Sorina Oprea, Colleen O'Dwyer, Ljiljana Milicevic, Sarla Chandriae, Margery Been, Hyacinthe Miller, Dana Smith, Zdenka Rumlova, Deniz Şahinbaş Şen, Takako Yoshimoto, Yoon Soon Huh and Carlos Espinosa.

I want to congratulate Carlos on becoming the new president of the Consular Spouses Association of Toronto and organizing today's visit. Welcome.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Victor Terreri, who is a Ryerson University student who's on placement to my office. He's studying political science at Ryerson and he is a former Ontario Hockey League hockey player.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I would like to welcome the Ontario Long Term Care Association to the House today. Please welcome Patrick McCarthy, Brent Gingerich, Colleen Laing, Lee Griffi, Bill O'Neill, Ruth McFarlane, Shirley Thomas-Weir, Adrienne Spafford and Kim Wosnick.

I would also like to remind everyone to stop by the OLTCA reception later on this afternoon between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. in the legislative dining room.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome Beth Potter from the Tourist Industry Association of Ontario. Also with her this morning are Keith Simmonds, Maddie Phillips and Ian McMillan. They're having their tourism day today and I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to welcome Kristyn Chambers from Durham region tourism here today with the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I would also like to welcome all of our friends from TIAO who represent the tourism industry here in Ontario: a \$28-billion sector employing

over 350,000 people. A big welcome to Terry Mundell and Beth Potter, CEO and chair of TIAO.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Would the members please join me in welcoming the family of the late Mr. Wayne Wettlaufer, MPP for Kitchener Centre during the 36th and 37th Parliaments, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his wife, Marilyn; daughter, Leanne Bell; and grandsons Tyler and Carter Bell. Welcome. Thank you for being with us.

WAYNE WETTLAUFER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader on a point of order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Wayne Wettlaufer, former member for Kitchener Centre, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm honoured to rise today to offer tribute to former MPP for Kitchener Centre Wayne Wettlaufer. Wayne was a proud public servant. He was proud of his heritage, proud of his community and proud to be a community leader in Kitchener.

When our community in Waterloo region learned of Wayne's passing last June, it shocked everyone. After all, he had just won a seat on regional council, continuing his record of public service. I think it was shocking for everyone, because he was such a vibrant, lively and consistent part of the fabric of community in Kitchener. It's still hard to believe that he is no longer with us. His contributions will be dearly missed.

Wayne was married to his soulmate, Marilyn, for 47 years. Together, they had a daughter, Leanne, and two grandchildren, Tyler and Carter. I know many of his family and friends have joined us here today for this tribute. Thank you for being here.

I'd like to make a few remarks about Wayne and how he represented the best of Kitchener and Waterloo region. Mr. Wettlaufer earned a degree from the University of Guelph before beginning his career in the insurance industry in the 1960s. As many of you will know, the insurance industry is a large employer in our region and many firms have headquarters there, like Manulife and Sun Life, as two examples.

Like many in Waterloo region, Wayne became part of a small business when he became a partner in the firm Wettlaufer, Collins, Rankin Insurance Brokers in 1984. His next step was into provincial politics, when he won the riding of Kitchener in 1995 and joined the PC government of Mike Harris. It's not easy to take the step into the public arena and put your name on the line, but Wayne believed that he could be a good representative, and he demonstrated that through his years of hard work here at Queen's Park.

In 1999, Wayne had a private member's bill passed into law—quite a remarkable achievement. It was an act that recognized German Pioneers Day in Ontario, the day after Thanksgiving every year. Wayne was proud of his heritage and the heritage of so many German immigrants and children of immigrants who call Waterloo region home to this day.

When he was speaking about his bill here at Queen's Park, before it became law in 2000, Wayne took great care to mention the many contributions Germans and German Canadians have made to our province and our country. He spoke about how the very first church built in Ontario was built by a German Canadian. He spoke about the waves of German immigration that have shaped the history of this province, going back to the 18th century. He spoke about the successes of German Canadians in the world of business, like J.M. Schneider meats, Bauer skates and Heintzman pianos.

I continue to look forward to participating in German Pioneers Day celebrations every year in Kitchener and Waterloo. Wayne Wettlaufer's efforts to mark this day will live on. What a wonderful legacy.

At Wayne's memorial service and visitation, it was clear to me that as people passed the display of achievements, awards and body of work, you could see that it was impressive, that Wayne lived his life with his principles at the forefront and with love in his heart for his family and his community. In many ways, his commitment to public service was a demonstration of how much he valued his life, his community, and indeed the opportunity to pay it forward. He did so with great intensity and passion. He could be a fierce and steadfast debater, especially on issues of fiscal responsibility.

When Wayne ran again in 2014, Margaret Johnston, one of his most recent running mates, said, "He was very supportive of younger politicians who stuck to their morals, even when they were on the opposite sides of issues. He admired backbone and morals ... and he also called people on it when they lacked those qualities.... He had a great sense of humour and timing."

The mayor of Kitchener, Berry Vrbanovic, mentioned how successfully Wayne transitioned from partisan provincial politics to non-partisan local government, where he was dedicated to serving all citizens in his community.

At the visitation, I spoke to his wife, Marilyn, about his commitment to public service. Few people, with the exception of close friends and family, outside this House fully understand the weight of this responsibility of holding a seat in the Legislature or at a city council table or school board. But our families bear witness to it, and they often pay the price.

On behalf of New Democrats, I thank Marilyn, her entire family and friends for sharing Wayne with us and his community. He left us too soon, but his life was well lived.

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

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very honoured, as the member of Parliament for Kitchener Centre, to offer a tribute as we recognize former member Wayne Wettlaufer, who

served in this Legislature from 1995 to 2003 in the great riding of Kitchener Centre. I, too, would like to welcome to the House today his wife, Marilyn; daughter, Leanne Bell; and grandchildren Tyler and Carter.

Wayne Wettlaufer was a loving husband and father, a proud grandparent, a dedicated legislator and very loyal to his friends. When Wayne passed away unexpectedly last year, it came as a shock to everyone who knew him.

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If you ask those people in Kitchener, they'll tell you that Wayne Wettlaufer was the quintessential political animal and fiercely proud of his reputation as a fiscal hawk. He attended the University of Guelph, earned a BA, and then set out to work in the insurance industry in Waterloo region. Wayne became the corporate marketing manager of Gore Mutual in 1980 and then four years later went on to become a partner in the firm of Wettlaufer, Collins, Rankin Insurance Brokers.

But politics called to him. In 1995, when the Common Sense Revolution swept across Ontario, Wayne found himself a part of that tide in a victorious win in Kitchener Centre.

That's when I first came to know Wayne Wettlaufer. I was anchoring and producing the weekly news and current affairs program province-wide at CTV in Kitchener. I remember that Wayne was kind, relaxed, friendly and always ready to face the cameras.

I also recall Wayne's great sense of style. He was a dapper dresser, always well-groomed and taking pride in his appearance—a real fashionista of the 1990s.

He was very proud of his German heritage. As a third-generation German Canadian, Wayne was a great champion of promoting and preserving German culture in our region. Kitchener–Waterloo is home to the largest population of people with German roots in Ontario, and as past president of the German-Canadian Congress, Wayne put forward a private member's bill to mark German Pioneers Day, which now takes place on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. He was successful in his endeavour, and every year since 2000, when the German Pioneers Day Act was passed, we mark this important event in our community with a special ceremony.

In the 2003 election, fortunes turned in Ontario. Just as the province had experienced a Conservative sweep in 1995, in 2003 Ontarians chose a Liberal government. John Milloy was elected to represent Kitchener Centre and remained in that post until he retired before the 2014 provincial election.

But Wayne Wettlaufer wasn't done. His love of politics brought him back into the limelight, and it would seem that he and I would meet again—only this time, not as politician and member of the media, but as political opponents.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect at this first encounter and, quite honestly, I was a little bit nervous. I had heard from some sources in our community that Wayne could be a formidable opponent in debates, and we faced four of them. The first one, a televised debate at our local Rogers station, was where I would first en-

counter Wayne since securing the nomination. It was Wayne who spotted me first in the lobby. He marched up with an outstretched hand, a smile on his face and a warm welcome. It was not what I was expecting, but no doubt a true testament to his core values. Wayne Wettlaufer at heart was a very kind man.

On election night, he came to our victory party and again greeted me with a warm smile and a handshake. With the TV cameras pointed at us, he offered congratulations. I said thank you and added, "Regardless of the outcome, you and I really want the same thing: We want our community to succeed." And then he leaned over and said in my ear, "Well, I guess the better man won." I laughed and thanked him, and promised that I would work hard, as he had, serving Kitchener Centre.

After the provincial vote, Wayne did not stay away from politics. He was still very much interested in serving our community and decided to vie for a position on regional council in the fall of 2014. He was successful, securing a seat. In the short seven months that he served, his colleagues on council described him as an active, positive and constructive regional councillor. It's truly unfortunate and a loss to our community that he was not able to serve longer.

Mr. Speaker, Wayne Wettlaufer was a gentleman and a selfless public servant. He was a loving husband and father. To Marilyn, Leanne, Tyler and Carter, you have a lot to be proud of. Cherish those memories. Wayne Wettlaufer has left a legacy of which to be proud, one that will not soon be forgotten.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Wayne's family, who are here from Kitchener this morning, to join as we pay tribute to a former MPP, regional councillor, grandfather to Tyler and Carter, father to Leanne and husband to Marilyn: Mr. Wayne Wettlaufer.

Speaker, when Kitchener lost then-regional councillor Wayne Wettlaufer at the age of 71 this past June, we lost a strong voice that inspired people to stand for what they believed in, to stand for principle, a voice that reminded listeners what it sounded like when someone is motivated to serve by the strength of their belief in doing what is right.

And though it may have taken a while for Wayne to find that strong voice in a public role, it was his strident concern for the political future of Ontario ahead of the 1995 election that first drove him to public service, in an effort to stand for his principles and raise that voice on the direction of government.

After working behind the scenes for many years on Tory campaigns—a lifer conservative from the age of 12—it was his overriding concern for the then NDP government's direction that got him so fired up that a friend asked him, "Wayne, if you feel so passionate about it, then why don't you just run?" Soon after, Wayne did just that, choosing to step out of his successful career as an insurance broker to dedicate himself to public service, and to devote that passion into ousting the government and joining the Common Sense Revolution.

Ironically, it was similar concerns for the future of Ontario close to 20 years later—concerns of the impacts that yet another government was having on our province's economy—that led Wayne to again stand on principle and get back into carrying the PC flag into the provincial election of 2014. And though some may have felt his inspiration was possibly partisan-based, the fact is that to Wayne, his inspiration was drawn from caring for his area—the people and the businesses—caring enough to ensure they had a voice that would fight for what's right on their behalf.

Once in the Legislature, that voice became a common fixture in this chamber, whether it be to argue strongly on economic issues true to his conservative beliefs, or to stand for the people of Kitchener on local issues unique to our area of the province, or to just chat up members of all parties. His voice was heard.

While it wasn't always easy—it wasn't often easy—and while the successes were tempered by defeats, his wife, Marilyn, tells us that Wayne never came home with his head hung low. He was a fighter. He fought for what he believed in; he fought hard for it. In the end, in defeat or victory, he could always hold his head high, because he realized that when you stand on principle, you win either way.

Most who saw him in action in this House will remember Wayne as a stereotypical conservative, perhaps, passionate about his politics and his province. But on the other side of Wayne was the family side, his compassionate side: a loving grandfather, a father, and dedicated husband to his wife, Marilyn, of 47 and a half years. Together, they were inseparable.

That compassionate side was often shown when the cameras weren't on. Just last winter, Marilyn tells us, while driving down King Street on a frigid day in Kitchener, he pulled over when he saw a homeless man on the sidewalk. He pulled up, got out, and asked the man if he had any gloves. When the answer came back, "No," Wayne took off his own gloves and handed them to their new owner. When he returned to the car, he told his wife, "Well, I didn't need those gloves anyway."

It was those little things, Speaker, that said so much about the man that Wayne was, realizing that when we all look out for each other, again, we all win.

One of the biggest wins and one of Wayne's proudest accomplishments in this Legislature was his work designating German Pioneers Day in Ontario. While he was a third-generation Canadian, Wayne was also from Kitchener, formerly known as Berlin, and was very proud of his German heritage. He was the past president of the German-Canadian Congress; served on an exchange committee with German governments to discuss finance and economics, education and health; and, through his private member's bill, Bill 28, An Act to proclaim German Pioneers Day, ensured that we now recognize the efforts of our German pioneers the day after every Thanksgiving since the bill's passing. Locally, German Pioneers Day is celebrated during the largest Bavarian festival outside of Germany, Kitchener-Waterloo's Oktoberfest.

Always looking to make a difference for the people of his riding, young or old, Wayne spent his final day at the Legislature introducing a bill to recognize Amateur Baseball Month in Ontario.

But his advocacy wasn't just reserved for his German ancestry or our young ballplayers in those eight years. In between, Wayne made his mark as an active MPP, a deputy whip, a partisan with friends on both sides of the floor, and a sharp dresser who always looked to do the right thing in support of our community. Wayne was doing just that when he stood on behalf of his community members to support St. Mary's hospital in the face of a very serious concern for its future. He argued for its enduring sustainability in fulfilling vital Kitchener health care needs, and I'm happy to report that more than a decade later, the hospital stands today as a testament to the work of Wayne and his fellow St. Mary's supporters.

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Sadly, it was St. Mary's hospital where Wayne spent his final hours, leaving behind a strong legacy as an accountable representative, advocate of community engagement and principled defender of democracy. Wayne Wettlaufer is already missed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also in the east visitors' gallery, here for the tribute, is former MPP Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North. Welcome, and thank you for being here for the tribute.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their kind and heartfelt statements to the family. Our deepest sympathies. You will be receiving a DVD and a hard copy of Hansard of today's testimony, in kind respect and homage to Wayne. Thank you very much for being here, and I thank all members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Every day, the real cost of this Liberal government's scandals, waste and mismanagement is being felt by Ontario's families and seniors. Money that should be invested in front-line health care is, instead, being spent on cancelled gas plants. In order to pay for their scandals and waste, this government has cut \$815 million from physician services, 50 medical residency spots and \$50 million in seniors' physiotherapy services. These cuts mean that patients are not receiving the quality health care they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, will Thursday's budget properly fund health care in Ontario and will there be more cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is eager to chime in on the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Health care is a priority for our government. It has been and will continue to be. Since 2003, hospital funding in Ontario has risen from \$11.3 billion to \$17.3

billion. That's a 53% increase. We're investing \$11 billion to expand, renew and modernize hospitals. Those are capital dollars to build up the hospital system.

We're increasing our investments in home care by 5%. Those investments will grow by over \$750 million over the next two years. Funding for community supports increased to almost \$514 million this year. That's an increase of \$41.9 million over the last year. In every aspect of health care, funding has gone up. We understand it's a priority. We will continue those increases.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, back to the Premier: In addition to the \$815 million cut from physician services, this government cut \$54 million from the health care budget last year, despite a 6% increase in the federal government's health transfer. Because of that cut and cuts to physiotherapy and eye care, Ontario patients are suffering, and it will only get worse. This Liberal government is so out of touch, they refuse to admit their cuts are forcing doctors to close practices and forcing hospitals to fire nurses.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government put patients first? Will Thursday's budget reverse the cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how an increase in our budget for health care and an increase in the budget for our physicians could be somehow at all translated into the sorts of cuts that the member opposite has alluded to. In fact, with regard to our doctors, we had a year of negotiations that unfortunately led to no agreement, but we brought in an umpire, a third-party adjudicator who gave us the best recommendations and implored the OMA to accept what he viewed as a fair offer by the government at that time.

Unfortunately, the OMA did not accept the retired Judge Winkler's recommendation and we had to make some changes in order to put patients first, in order to invest an additional \$250 million in home care, in order to invest more in mental health services—\$138 million of new money over the next three years. Those are investments that are important to Ontarians. Notwithstanding that, our doctors are the best paid in Canada.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back again to the Premier: Premier, when you cut front-line health care professionals, you're cutting patients' quality and access to health care. I wish you'd get that right.

This Liberal government continues to spew out their fictional figures. The numbers just don't lie. I'll give you some: 10 nurses were cut at Almonte General Hospital; 17 nurses cut at Southlake Regional Health Centre; 20 full-time positions gone at Orillia Soldiers'; 33 job cuts at Cambridge Memorial; and 350 full-time positions gone in the riding of Nipissing at the North Bay regional hospital.

All of these cuts were done in the last year alone. Each cut translates into reduced health care for Ontario's patients. When will it stop? Why won't this government put patients first and stop and reverse the cuts?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, here are some important figures that I think the Ontario public would appreciate hearing as well. The PC government of Mike Harris fired 6,000 nurses. In fact, we know in the last election campaign that they were campaigning on eliminating 100,000 jobs in the broader public sector. That would have translated into approximately 5,000 more health care workers losing their jobs.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, the member from Simcoe–Grey should look to see that I'm standing.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: What have we done? We've increased the number of nurses that are practising in this province by 25,000 since we came into government. We've—

Mr. Steve Clark: Cut, cut, cut.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not going to play the game of yo-yo, that when I sit down, you start. If it starts again, I'll warn the member.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We've increased the number of nurses working full-time in this province by 30%. We're adding 900 net new doctors to the province this year alone. And we continue to make important investments, including in home care and mental health services.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement are having a real impact on the services families deserve. During pre-budget consultations, Ken Lewenza Sr., a former union president, said the following: "Government has a role ... to provide some humanity, some moral responsibility, some ethical standards, to those that we care for.... If we can't take care of seniors and our most disabled, then the reality is, we're not meeting our moral compass." I believe he is right. If the Liberals had a moral compass, this Thursday's budget would reverse the cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals.

Will this government stop their health care cuts and take care of seniors and our most vulnerable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has just gone over the list of investments that we have made that have meant that there are more doctors, there are more nurses, there are more health care workers in this province by thousands than there were when we came into office. We have continued, year over year, to increase that funding.

Now, the member opposite can recite a piece of rhetoric; that doesn't make it true. The fact is that there are more health professionals. There are hospitals hiring nurses in this province. There are more doctors by the thousands than when we came into office. The member

will see in the budget on Thursday that we will continue to increase funding to health care because the need continues to increase. Will there be more home care? Absolutely. Will there be more supports for people, for seniors? Absolutely. That has been our record and that is our promise.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: During those same consultations, Hank Beekhuis of the Christian Labour Association, representing workers in long-term-care homes, told us this: They had “a resident die at the hands of another resident who was not, and could not, based on staffing levels, be adequately supervised.” He said they “have had residents neglected or hurt because of this pervasive problem. It puts workers in a difficult and often unsafe situation.”

It was over 10 years ago when the coroner’s inquest into the Casa Verde murders recommended proper funding to care for long-term residents. Yet, 10 years later, patient-on-patient violence in long-term-care homes continues to rise. How many more seniors will die unnecessarily before this government properly funds our long-term-care homes?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say to the member opposite that I think that there is more work to be done in our long-term-care sector. I think that the acuity of the condition of seniors when they go into long-term-care homes has increased. I think that there is a need, for example, for more training for health care professionals as they deal with seniors, more of whom are dealing with dementia; as I say, there’s greater acuity. So that’s why we’ve invested \$44 million annually on the Behavioural Supports Ontario program.

On top of that, there have been billions of dollars invested in long-term care. We’ve increased long-term-care home funding to \$3.97 billion in 2015-16, from \$2.1 billion in 2003-04. That’s an 85% increase. But there’s more that we have to do, and you will see in the budget, Mr. Speaker, that we recognize that.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: We know it’s not just seniors in long-term-care homes who are suffering because of this government’s waste and mismanagement. Rhonda Gow, a personal support worker, said this at the pre-budget hearings about the lack of safe staffing levels: There is “a vicious cycle of higher time loss due to work-related injuries and staff burnout.” Rhonda often hears from co-workers who share her worry about the impact of poor working conditions on the residents’ health and safety. But what Rhonda, Hank and Ken had to say was wasted on this government, because the reality is that the Liberals wrote their budget long before these consultations ever happened.

Can the Premier promise Rhonda, Hank and Ken that Thursday’s budget will reverse her cuts to seniors’ health care and ensure safe staffing levels across long-term-care homes?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’m glad the member opposite raises the issue of personal support workers because I heard no support from them and no support from the third party for the increase in salaries that we put in place last year for personal support workers.

Look, Mr. Speaker, we are the government that understands that personal support workers are the backbone of home care delivery in this province. That’s why, this year, personal support workers will get—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: She’s very angry today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew: Do you realize I’m standing?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I’m sorry. I apologize.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Personal support workers will get another increase this year because we recognize how important they are to the system.

I also look to the party opposite, now that they’ve had this epiphany around precarious work, to support the work we’re doing to make sure that personal support workers don’t have the precarious work situation that they often find themselves in.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. People expect government to invest in their priorities, like health care and reducing wait times, but this government doesn’t seem to share those priorities. In fact, the Liberals have frozen hospital funding in the last four budgets, forcing hospitals to close beds and fire nurses.

The people of Ontario want good, high-quality health care in their community. They deserve to know if the Premier is going to continue to freeze hospitals in Thursday’s provincial budget. Will there be more cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to weigh in on this, but as we have said repeatedly, we have consistently, year over year, increased funding to health care. The member opposite, when she sees the budget, will realize that we are continuing to put more resources in place, because we know that the needs in health care are expanding.

But here’s an issue that I think we need to look at more closely: The leader of the third party is using “hospitals” and “health care” interchangeably. The leader of the third party is suggesting that hospitals and health care are the same thing. Hospitals are a part of health care delivery. Hospitals are a very important part of the way we deliver health care in Ontario, but they are not the whole thing. So I would ask the leader of the third party if she believes that hospitals are all there is to health care in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier may say in public that she wants to protect health care, but the reality is that since the start of 2015, more than 1,200 nurses have

been handed a pink slip by this Liberal government. No matter what rhetoric this Premier wants to spread, the reality is hospitals have been frozen, nurses are being fired and patients are not getting—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, please.

I'll use this moment to remind all members that when questioning and answering, you're speaking to the Chair.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Patients are not getting the kind of care and the kind of response that they deserve at our hospitals. That's the bottom line.

So if this Premier is so committed to protecting health care—which hospitals are a part of, I might add—will she put an end to the front-line cuts in our health care system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: One thing I can assure the leader of the third party is that we will not return to the days when her party was in power when they fired 3,000 nurses, when they decreased the number of nurses who were working full-time and brought in more part-time workers. Nor will we return to the years when doctors were fleeing this province because they were so disrespected by the official opposition.

Don't take the government's word for it. I know that they've refrained from looking at the facts and the statistics, but if we look at the word of the College of Nurses of Ontario, they say that Ontario nurses reported 86,794 employment positions in the hospital sector in 2014 and that it went up by just under 1,000 to 87,513 in 2015. They need to look at the net, not the gross, not the losses, but also the additions. That is in the hospital sector alone.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, the Premier said that Ontario is going through a health care transformation. Let's look at what that transformation has done to health care, what the Liberal transformation has done to health care: fewer nurses in our hospitals; cancelled surgeries for patients; people waiting 200 days or more for home care; and long-term-care wait-lists that are years long. That is not transformation; that is devastation for the patients of this province.

Will this Premier stop the cuts and get health care working for all Ontarians, or will we see more hospital budgets frozen and front-line health care cuts in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Just because the parties opposite continue to use the word "cut" doesn't mean that it's true. In fact, year after year after year, our health care budget increases. Our investments in those important areas like home care are increasing year after year after year—\$250 million additional this year alone.

But here are some of the other things that we've been doing: We've been investing in mental health services, increasing with new funds—\$138 million over the next three years; we've created 82 health links to provide that wraparound, coordinated care for thousands and thousands of the most complex patients across the province; 25 new nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the first one in Sudbury, Ontario; and we invest in all of our health care providers, many, many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands across the province, who are doing exceptional work. Our wait times are the best in the country and our outcomes are approaching the best as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. In the 2014 budget, the Premier quietly slipped in a reference to her plan to cut 6% from most ministries every year, including this year. Perhaps she hoped nobody would notice, but we did. That 6% will mean cuts to everything from food safety to protection of our environment.

Will the Premier continue to make things worse by cutting 6% from other programs in Thursday's budget over and above her government's cuts to education and health care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party knows full well that we continue to make investments in education and we continue to make investments in health care. I think that the last number of questions have demonstrated that those increases in health care funding have been repeated year over year, and we continue to recognize that there's an increased need in health care, whether it's in home care, whether it's in hospitals, or whether it's in mental health. Those are services that are necessary and we continue to fund those and increase funding.

The reality is that our plan is about investing in the people of this province and investing in infrastructure that is needed in every community. Yesterday I was at the ROMA/Ontario Good Roads Association meeting and I talked about the increases that we are making to the community investment fund that will allow municipalities to have more money on a formula basis to make investments in infrastructure. That's the work that we're doing across government.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontarians expect honesty from their government, but the Premier is planning to cut 6% out of other programs and hoping people won't notice. Cutting 6% is not investing; it's cutting. Saying you're cutting 6% from other programs covers a lot of ground, and it's not what I would call transparent.

That 6% isn't just a number. It could mean cutting support for the most vulnerable Ontarians, or reducing even further the safety of roads and commercial vehicles, or making it even more difficult for young people to get the speech therapy that they need.

Can this Premier come clean, be transparent and tell Ontarians what other services she'll be cutting in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I invite the leader of the third party to read the budget on Thursday so that she will understand how we are making investments across this province. She will also see that there are changes being made in the way we deliver government.

There are transformations that are happening. There's a process that the President of the Treasury Board has gone through. She has worked, ministry by ministry, looking at programs, working with the ministries to change programs where they are not delivering outcomes and to reinvest in programs that are working.

I just made an announcement this morning about \$100 million that we are putting into services and supports that will help fight violence against indigenous women and work to end the violence against indigenous women. Those are the kinds of investments that are critical.

Will there be changes? Are we changing government? Absolutely. We're not going to stay stuck in the past and never change anything—

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps the Premier will understand how health care, education and other services that people rely on are eroding significantly here in Ontario under this government's watch.

Ontario's Financial Accountability Officer says that selling Hydro One will mean that the province's budget balance would be worse than it would have been without the sale, Speaker.

Before the Premier came clean with her plan to sell Hydro One, she was already planning to blindly slash 6% out of the budget of almost every ministry. The Hydro One sell-off will put Ontario in even worse financial shape. Does that mean that the cuts will be even deeper than what Ontarians are already experiencing under this Liberal government's watch?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When the budget is released on Thursday, the people of Ontario, including the leader of the third party, will have an opportunity to look at how we are making changes across government and how we are investing in the people of this province and investing in the infrastructure—"infrastructure" is a word that encompasses a lot of things, but it means roads and bridges and water systems; it means transit. Those kinds of investments lead to economic growth in the future, but they lead to job creation immediately, and that is critical to our economic stability right now in Ontario.

We're in a global and a national economy, Mr. Speaker, where it is our responsibility to take the leadership role. We have a strong, diversified economy. We have lots more to do, but we're a little bit ahead in terms of other provinces. It is our responsibility to play to our strengths, to make those investments so that we can lead the way and we can be strong in the context of the national economy.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Lorne Coe: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. It's an absolute honour and pleasure to have been elected to represent the people of Whitby-Oshawa. They've sent me to Queen's Park with a clear mandate, and they've asked me to hold the government to account for their cuts to health care in Durham region, in particular.

Under the Liberals' watch, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences has had 56 jobs cut—56 jobs cut. They were much-needed nurse positions that have led to wait times up to a year in duration.

Will the Premier reverse the health cuts in Durham region and will she give my constituents the health care system they deserve?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. Ontario Shores provides excellent mental health services to many, many Ontarians from across this province. I know that access to mental health services is important as well to the residents of Whitby-Oshawa, and I will fight to continue to ensure that they have access to these crucial services.

But the member forgot to mention—again, the opposition talks about job loss. Often, job changes occur, and because of our relationship with organized labour, we have to lay people off, even in some circumstances when they're just moving to another part of the hospital or they're moving into another program within the hospital.

I'm sure the member opposite knows, although he didn't perhaps have time to mention, that the changes which are very well thought about at Ontario Shores also mean that 33 new positions will be created, many of those available to the individuals that he referenced.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: With this government's cuts to health care, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences is just the tip of the iceberg, isn't it?

Concerned Ontario doctors showed up in Whitby-Oshawa to send the Liberals a strong message, and we've listened. The government's cuts are forcing physicians to reduce their office hours and to lay off, or reduce staff hours. We know a family doctor in Durham region who had to reduce office hours and that has now affected 500 patients.

Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier explain to those patients why they can't get a doctor's appointment?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think they need to ask that doctor, because there's nothing that

we've done that affects access to patient care. Our doctors, apart from being the best-paid in all of Canada—we continue to invest in them.

I want to point out what's extremely important for Ontarians to know: This is about compensation for physicians only. It's not about quality or access to health care services. Physicians will continue to be compensated for every single service they provide. There are no limits to the number of patients that a physician can see. No physicians will ever be asked to work for free. There's no individual cap on what a physician can bill annually.

All of these myths that are perpetrated out there by a number of individuals bear no aspect when we're talking about the changes that have been made to continue to support our physicians and to allow us to make those investments in home care, and mental health services like Ontario Shores.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. When California launched its cap-and-trade program a few years ago, large emitters were included right away. Household fuel and gasoline were added two years later. But in Ontario, it appears we're doing it the other way around: The government has proposed that Ontario families shall start paying right away, but the large emitters will get a free pass for four years.

Why must Ontario families put their money on the table before the big emitters?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is getting his information from. I think he's confusing the idea of free allowances, which help industry transition. You may know that there are jurisdictions that do not have a price on carbon yet, and we have to protect our industries from those and keep them competitive.

Over 85% of industries, likely—as they were in California—will be paying, and paying at a reasonable rate, on pollution and will also benefit from dollars coming from cap-and-trade to reinvestment.

Yes, we are proceeding with an across-the-board reduction, but that money is also going back into a plethora of programs, many of them already announced in kick-start programs, helping people reduce home heating costs, helping people buy electric vehicles and helping people reduce the cost of living, which California and Quebec did not do in the first instance. We think we're ahead of the curve—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, in the minister's consultation document, there are free passes for all large industrial emitters on cap-and-trade, whether they need one or not. But all Ontario families will start paying right away, whether they can afford to or not.

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Ontarians are ready to do their part to fight climate change, but they want a system that is effective, fair and

transparent. Is the government proposing to give out free passes because its cap-and-trade policy is driven by lobbyists and special interests rather than the need to deal with climate change?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm going to try and say it again slowly.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you. I'm going to say it again slowly. The vast majority of businesses we have—we estimate that over 85% of large emitters will be paying on the same terms that they pay almost exactly in Quebec and Ontario, which, up until today, the member opposite supported. This is not surprising, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has trouble with the environment. Every time it comes to tough decisions, they get all wobbly in the knees and look for excuses not to proceed.

A price on pollution is a price on pollution, and we will have an equitable and fair distribution of the costs. But they all seem to have taken subtraction costs and never addition, because they can only talk about half the ledger. I don't know whether it's some sort of dyslexia but, quite frankly, there's a major—

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, actually, start the clock. I would ask us all to elevate the debate. At any given time, members might excitedly say things that I know they don't want to say, and if there's an opportunity to withdraw, I'm going to ask that it be withdrawn.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would withdraw. I got carried away in my rhetoric. I apologize.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The normal procedure is simply a withdrawal. I want to do it right. Just withdraw.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I withdraw, Speaker.

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

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. As you know, Minister, many of the good people of Eglinton-Lawrence are very impressed with the changes to make local Ontario wines more available to them. They're also very interested in the accessibility to fruit wines and ciders. I know you made an important announcement with the Premier about more availability. You had a great announcement in Kawartha with Mr. Rufa and his local winery there.

What we really want to know is, how are these fruit wines and the local craft ciders especially—how are they going to get their hands on them? Where can they purchase them in a city like Toronto and make sure that the farmers and the food growers in Peterborough county and Prince Edward county have jobs and continue to expand?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for this question this morning. I know he's been a tireless advocate throughout the greater Toronto area to make sure that we develop the cidery and fruit wine business of the province of Ontario.

I had the enormous privilege of being with the Premier, Minister Sousa and Mr. Bradley last Thursday when we made the announcement about extending new distribution channels for VQA wines, cider and fruit wines in the province of Ontario. It's the first big change in the distribution of alcohol in Ontario since Prohibition ended in 1926.

We're allowing, of course, cider and wine to be supplied in 450 grocery stores across the province of Ontario. This fall, 70 stores will carry Ontario cider and wines on their shelves and up to 35 grocery stores will carry fruit wines. These changes will help wineries like Kawartha Country Wines in the municipality of Trent Lakes in the wonderful county of Peterborough.

In all, these changes will help to stimulate growth in the agriculture sector—

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

Mr. Mike Colle: Through you, Mr. Speaker, as you know, Minister, people in all of Ontario, especially in the heart of Toronto—my riding—really appreciate our local Ontario wines, the VQA wines and all the wines locally. They just love them. But now, they don't quite know too much about the cideries, the cider wines and the fruit wines and how they could find out more about them, where they could purchase them, who produces these fruit wines and the ciders, and how they can be available to the local person who wants a nice glass of cider instead of beer or wine. Where can they get their cider?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for his supplementary this morning.

The Ontario fruit wine sector is growing about 6% annually in Ontario. There are 40 wineries that produce fruit wines in the province of Ontario. We do know that the cider sector is one of the fastest-growing segments in our LCBO, and Ontario cider producers produced almost four million litres last year. That's a lot of support for Ontario's apple farmers. Fruit wines and ciders will be available at farmers' markets this spring.

Joseph Kennedy once said, when his son was elected president in 1960, that victory has a thousand fathers. I just want to thank the Premier this morning, the member from Dufferin–Caledon, the member from Beaches–East York, the former Minister of Agriculture Leona Dombrowsky, and a great friend of us all, Senator Bob Runciman. Collectively, we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Jeff Leal: —to make these changes to the province of Ontario.

Introducing Ontario cider and fruit wine made with 100% Ontario fruit to grocery stores and farmers' markets will provide a great boost to the agriculture sector—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health. Last month, all three parties toured the province for our pre-budget consultations. What we heard was startling, especially regarding the cuts to health care, with nursing jobs being cut by the hundreds. We all heard horror stories about patients collapsing on their front steps after being sent home too soon, or seniors crying out of hunger because their caregiver was too overwhelmed.

These are real stories from real people, presented to our committee. It's too bad the budget was already written and none of these people's issues seem to matter to this government. They're not even concerned about the appearance of listening anymore.

My question is, why is the minister so callously ignoring the legitimate concerns of families?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. As minister and also as a health care professional, I have great sympathy for any Ontarian, and their family and their loved ones, who is facing health care challenges.

It's our obligation—it's my responsibility—to ensure to the best of my ability and this government's ability that we address in a responsible, effective and timely way, as close to home as possible, what those needs are. That is the basis for many of the changes that, on behalf of the government and as the minister, I've been implementing in the health care system in areas like home care, in areas like mental health, working with our front-line health care providers to ensure that we continue to improve the services that we provide.

I'm gratified that in many, many indicators—cancer care, for example—we're among the best in the world in terms of outcomes. For wait-lists, the time to wait for special diagnostic tests or for surgical procedures, we're the best in Canada.

Of course, there's more work to be done. That's the commitment that I've made to Ontarians: to continue to improve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: Hundreds of front-line health care and nursing jobs have been cut across the province by this Liberal government. My hometown of North Bay has been affected the most, with 350 job cuts of front-line health care workers at our hospital, including 100 nurses.

Last week, the Minister of Finance mocked our three budget requests, calling them a fiscal fantasy. So according to this government, it's a fantasy to want enough nurses to provide timely care for our seniors. It's apparently a fantasy to expect enough doctors for underserved areas of rural and northern Ontario.

My question to the minister is this: Does he agree with the Minister of Finance that having adequate staffing for Ontario patients is a fantasy?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, because of some of the changes that we've made, we've begun to address the concerns that were just raised in the supplementary.

We have made changes to our family health teams to actually direct those new physicians to those parts of the province that need to also benefit from that comprehensive model of care. We have parts of Ontario, like Toronto, for example, where we have good staffing of our family health teams, and that model is available.

But in places like northern Ontario, rural Ontario and small-town Ontario, my obligation is to ensure that those services are also provided there. We opened up a medical school in northern Ontario, which has had a tremendous impact on the availability of health care providers, including physicians, in that part of Ontario—a dramatic improvement right across the north. When the intake represents individuals from those communities, they stay in those communities. There's more work to be done, but we have to also acknowledge the success and the difference in patient care.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Education. We recently learned that kids, particularly those with special needs, are being kicked out of Ontario's publicly funded schools indefinitely—some for months, some for closer to a year. Underfunding for special education resources, to the point where students with unique needs are excluded from class, is absolutely disgraceful, as if 16,000 kids on the spectrum waiting for services wasn't bad enough.

Accommodating students with special education needs should be at the forefront of this government's education plan, not an afterthought. Will the minister admit that her government's cuts to education are leaving our absolutely most vulnerable kids behind?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I do want to assure the member opposite that we're very concerned about the needs of our special education children. One of the things that happened when we did the safe schools review, back when the Premier was the Minister of Education, was that the whole matter of exclusion came up.

Just to explain—Speaker, you know, because you were in the business of principaling—one of the principal's most important roles is to ensure that all the people in the school are safe. There actually is the ability for a principal to exclude individuals from a school to ensure the safety of everyone else. We know that sometimes that is inappropriately used with special education students—and I'll be pleased to carry on with the answer after that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The minister's misplaced priorities are leaving our most vulnerable children behind. More than \$6 million in special education funding was cut from Toronto school boards last year alone. We know that more cuts are coming in this impending budget.

The results of underfunding in education are clear: Countless educational assistants have been fired. Supports in classrooms are at an all-time low, leaving kids

with unique needs out of the classroom, with no options or timelines.

Can the minister please explain why she doesn't think that all kids in Ontario deserve a right to equal-access education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to make it clear that, in fact, under Ontario legislation all children with special needs are entitled to an education. With exclusion, as I wanted to say, we actually changed the law so that if a parent is concerned, they have a right of appeal of that exclusion. That never existed in Ontario law before. The parent does have a right of appeal on an exclusion.

On the matter of funding, students with special education needs are receiving approximately \$2.72 billion this school year. That is an increase—not a cut—of \$225.7 million, or 9% since 2012-13, and a 68% increase, \$1.1 billion, since 2002.

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Attorney General. Navigating the law system without the help of a qualified legal professional can be a daunting task. In the area of family law in particular, many people are accessing the family justice system without the help of a lawyer, either for reasons of cost or because they think they can manage the system on their own. In fact, your ministry estimates that as many as 57% of people in the province are currently doing so without legal assistance.

Can the Attorney General please speak to her efforts to make the family law system more accessible?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to the member from Northumberland-Quinte West for his very, very important question. Access to justice is a great priority of mine, not just in the area of family law, but across the legal system. The honourable member is correct: Far too many Ontarians proceed in family law matters without legal representation. As the member said, nearly 60%, and in some areas 70%, of individuals and families go to court without assistance. We hope that by expanding the range of services available, more families will get access to the help they need.

To this end, we have asked the Honourable Annemarie Bonkalo, former Chief Justice of the Ontario court, to lead a review in ways to make a family system more accessible for those unable to afford a lawyer. Justice Bonkalo will consult with a wide variety of stakeholders across the legal community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I thank the Attorney General for her response. I'm pleased to hear that our government is taking steps to ensure that all citizens have access to the advice they need to properly navigate the family law system.

I also know that not everyone who needs family legal services qualifies for legal aid. Expanding the range of family legal services available will no doubt help many families in Ontario get access to that much-needed help.

Could the Attorney General elaborate on the focus of Justice Bonkalo's review in seeking to provide more accessible legal assistance in family law matters?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much to the MPP for this important question.

Justice Bonkalo will consult with stakeholders from across the legal community and the families they serve in asking whether paralegal or other legal service providers, such as law students or law clerks, should be allowed to handle certain family law matters. Law students, paralegals and clerks offer a wide range of legal expertise and a variety of legal services in many different areas of the law. This review will help us determine if and how it would be appropriate for them in the area of family law.

Mr. Speaker, we want Ontario families to have more choice, and we hope this consultation will help us provide more affordable access to the family law system in the province.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, last year, you and the Premier were sent a letter from a family doctor in my riding which outlined the negative impacts your government's cuts to physician services would have on patients in her group practice. In the letter, the doctor warned that, as a result of your cuts, they were considering shutting down their blood lab. As of January 1, the lab is closed.

This government's actions are resulting in cuts in essential services that residents in my riding and across Ontario rely upon. After the minister received this letter and I raised this issue with him, did the minister meet with Dr. Maag or respond to her concerns?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I'm somewhat confused by the line of questioning, because the question prior by the new member from Whitby implored us to make further investments in mental health at Ontario Shores, but then the supplementary referred to his wanting further investments for our doctors. This is the line of questioning here as well.

We are investing new dollars in mental health services, \$138 million over the next three years. We are increasing our physician services budget this year compared to last year, and we'll increase it again in the year following. But we have to make sure that we're providing the patient-centred care that Ontarians need and deserve, and that requires sometimes asking our physicians to hold the line. It requires our best-paid physicians in all of Canada to hold the line so we can invest in home care, in mental health services, in all of those services that Ontarians hold dear when they do face those health challenges and need our help.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I don't know what's so hard to understand. Last year, in Dufferin county, there were five labs; now there are two. A 73-year-old constituent now has to travel 30 minutes each way and wait in a line outside, in January, because the lab in her hometown has been shut down. The only remaining lab in Orangeville was closed between Christmas and New Year's. This is completely unacceptable.

Will the minister restore funding to physician services in the upcoming budget so that patients in my riding can receive the lab services they need without having to stand outside?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

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Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I find it difficult to understand. On the one hand, the member is asking us to increase our investments to community labs, and on the other hand she's asking us to give more money to physicians.

I have to reiterate what I said earlier, that physicians will continue to be compensated for every single service they provide. To ensure that we stay within our budget, which is increasing for physicians each year, we're reducing modestly the amount we pay for individual services. But there are no limits to the number of patients that a physician can see, no physicians will ever be asked to work for free, and, on average, the discount that we've applied, that modest decrease in compensation—if you were, on average, as they are, a \$368,000 physician, receiving that level of compensation from the government, this would result in that amount decreasing perhaps to about \$350,000. But there's nothing that prevents physicians from extending their hours or seeing more patients. There's no cap.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Health. Time and time again, my leader and our caucus have stood up and pointed out the reality: Hospitals in this province have been flat-lined for the past number of years and that has resulted in services being diminished in those hospitals. You continually stand in this House and say that's not the case, everything is fine, but this flies in the face of the experience that constituents across Ontario are feeling.

I have a constituent in Moonbeam, Mr. Dana MacIntyre, who needs heart surgery as a result of a condition that he suffers. He gets referred to a hospital in Hamilton, he gets there at the end of January, and the guy who's the surgeon says, "You need to get in. You need to get in quick." The problem is, he's then told, "You have to wait at least six months," because of cutbacks at the hospital, that it had to be done because of the reduction in budget when you flat-lined it.

How could it be the case that this guy has to wait six months to get surgery that is life threatening? Is that a fair way to treat this man?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Certainly it's concerning any time we hear a story, if accurate, and I only assume that it is accurate, where an individual who truly needs heart surgery on an expedited basis is unable to receive that. But allocations for surgical procedures are made through the ministry to the LHINs, to the hospitals, and we ask our hospitals to responsibly manage that budget and be

able to prioritize with the clinicians, with the clinical experts. It shouldn't be the Minister of Health or my ministry that decides who should get a procedure, when and where. We rely on those clinical experts to actually truly prioritize who needs that surgery on an urgent basis.

I have no doubt that in the vast majority, the huge majority of cases, those clinical experts do precisely that, working in concert with the hospitals, with the allocations that are provided to them that allow for the surgery to happen in a timely fashion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, what Dana wants and what patients across this province want is that when they're sitting across from a surgeon who says, "You need surgery and you need it quickly," they know at the end of the day it's going to be done. But the way the system runs now, as a result of your flat-lining the budget in hospitals across this province, even though the doctors are saying this is surgery that needs to be done in a pressing way, it's not only been pushed back five or six months; when Dana called the hospital again on February 8, a week later, he was told that now the lineup is going to be six to nine months. Imagine what this man feels like. He's one constituent, one patient in the province of Ontario, who happens to have brought his case into my office. There are many, many more.

We need to know from you now, Minister, are you going to make sure people like this don't have to wait extraordinary amounts of time in order to be able to get surgery that is life threatening?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the supplementary. I'd be happy, on this individual case as well—which is an anomaly, because I've heard many, many cases where that prioritization does occur, where the surgery is provided on an expedited basis according to need. That's how our health care system works and the hospitals have the ability to prioritize with the clinical experts in this case.

But I'd be very interested and it would be important to me to follow up on this individual case, so I'd ask that the member and I have an opportunity to discuss that so I can find out precisely what went on in this particular circumstance.

TOURISM

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. As the member from Ottawa–Orléans, I want to take a moment to welcome Michael Crockatt to the House. Michael is the newly appointed president and chief executive of Ottawa Tourism, the second-largest regional tourism organization in Ontario and, of course, the RTO responsible for marketing the beautiful riding of Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Speaker, tourism is alive and well in Ottawa. We enjoy attractions like the National Gallery of Canada, the space museum and Rideau Hall. The Ottawa River features attractions like white water rafting, kayaking and cruise boat tours. We have the Calypso water park and festivals throughout the year, like Winterlude and Canada Day.

With tourism playing such an important part in my riding, I'm interested in hearing what the government has been doing to support the growth of the tourism sector in Ontario.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for Ottawa–Orléans for this important question. Tourism impacts every single region of this beautiful province. It's a \$28-billion sector, representing 4% of our GDP, and over 350,000 jobs here in the province of Ontario are attributed back to tourism.

Today we have many members who support the tourism sector through business and working through associations represented through the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario joining us here in the Legislature. Through our efforts over the last few decades, we've continuously built tourism here in the province of Ontario. We're going to continue to build tourism in the province of Ontario. It's led to a record-breaking year for tourism here in Ontario, with the most room stays in many regions across this great province.

We'll continue to invest as a province. I'd like to thank the member again for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. The business climate for tourism in Ontario has never been better. With the Canadian dollar attracting more tourists from the US, our biggest market, and targeted investments supporting key festivals and attractions, I am confident that this sector will expand. In fact, it is estimated that tourism in Ontario will grow from 4.2% of our economy to 9.6% by 2021.

With over 40% of the sector's jobs held by Ontarians between the ages of 15 and 24, that's good news for youth employment. The importance of tourism and of youth employment seems to be lost on the PCs. The last PC government provided less than \$63 million a year, less than half of what our government provides annually.

Through you to the minister: What's the next step the minister is taking to ensure that our government is supporting continued growth in our tourism industry?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, thank you to the member for Ottawa–Orléans, who is a huge advocate for the tourism sector in Ottawa and also throughout the province.

I had the opportunity to join the member from Kitchener this past week to talk to leaders in tourism from the region. We talked about tourism and its potential continuous growth here in the province of Ontario. We're going to have more meetings, in Toronto, Peterborough, Sudbury, Ottawa, Niagara, Pembroke, Muskoka and Hamilton, to name a few.

This is only part of how our government has continued to build a strategy so that we can continue to grow the sector here in the province of Ontario. I'm also working with the federal government. We've come up with a \$30-million fund to market Ontario and different parts of Canada to the Americans in the south so we can continue to develop and build on tourism here in Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I hand-delivered a letter to the minister outlining the growing concern of doctor shortages in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Sometime over the next few years, our community stands to lose a number of family doctors to retirement. As Chatham-Kent has not been deemed a high-needs area, it is subject to the province's "one doctor in, one doctor out" policy. By trying to replace doctors one at a time, we'll always be chasing the problem. Patients fall through the cracks and are left without primary care providers for extended periods of time.

Recently, a local doctor passed away. I knew her well. She was my doctor. Her untimely death left nearly 2,800 patients without care. To the minister: Where should these patients turn?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate receiving a letter last week from the member opposite, and also the good work we've been doing together on Leamington obstetrics, to make sure that we retain the ability of women to have their births at that community hospital.

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But on this matter, there's no restriction at all on physicians coming to and practising in Chatham-Kent. Mr. Speaker, a physician can go there and start a practice under fee for service. They can go there and start a practice under a family health group. They can replace a retiring physician at a family health team. They can actually create a new family health team in Chatham-Kent under new rules that we've created. What we've done is we want the majority of those family health teams to actually be located in the high-needs areas where those family health teams currently don't exist. It's such a great model. I think it's an opportunity that all Ontarians should have. We're trying to distribute it more fairly.

There are so many modalities. They can start at a family health team as a locum. There's a long list of opportunities for physicians to come to—

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Minister, for that response. You mentioned Leamington. Well, guess what? I have a question about Leamington.

Once again, the future of Leamington's birthing services is in jeopardy. The search is on at Leamington District Memorial Hospital for a new ob-gyn, as its only one is set to leave for Windsor at the end of May. The clinic will stay open, but will it be staffed?

The ministry has approved \$1.2 million for the operation of the OB unit, but the chief nursing executive and vice-president of patient services, Cheryl Deter, says more is needed to run the clinic. They need an additional \$400,000. Specifically, any OB candidates who have to relocate to the area are going to want a guaranteed salary as the unit gets back on track, and they need the guarantee in writing.

To the minister: What action will the minister take to ensure birthing services stay in Leamington?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member knows this has been an absolute priority for both of us: to make sure that obstetrics is maintained. In fact, because of his hard work and my involvement and my ministry's involvement, we've created a model which brings in midwives, as well, to what's happening at Leamington hospital, to provide a holistic approach to the delivery of birthing services. We did provide an additional \$1 million in new funding in the current fiscal year to allow that transition to take place.

I know the OMA has opposed the funding—what he has asked for—but we will be going ahead to ensure that those guarantees necessary to be able to attract obstetricians to Leamington hospital do occur, notwithstanding the opposition that the OMA has provided to us doing just that.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure. Industry giants like the CEO of Ford Motor Canada have said, "Right now as the TPP stands, there will be no positive outcome for Canadian manufacturing."

In fact, the TPP is expected to put 20,000 Ontario auto jobs at risk and cost 1,500 jobs in my community of Oshawa alone. We can't afford to lose any more. These aren't just stats, Mr. Speaker; they are people, they are families.

Minister, can Ontarians expect to see a firm commitment to creating good-paying jobs in this week's budget, or will they see more of the same stretch goals that the government has become so fond of?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I welcome the voice of the member opposite in joining us as we have expressed concerns to the federal government regarding some of the rules of origin that could impact our industry and the industry as a whole. It kind of depends on where they are in the industry as to whether they're for or against the changes.

At the same time, we've expressed concern on behalf, in particular, of the auto supply parts industry to the federal government to take a very, very close look at the impacts as this moves forward.

We're concerned about the timetable compared to Ontario and US companies in terms of the rules of origin and how quickly that timetable excels, and we've expressed those concerns.

This is a trade agreement that was negotiated by the federal government without the provinces at the table, like CETA, but we'll continue to stand up for our auto sector in any way that we can.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on a point of order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, in the members' west gallery today, I want to introduce a good friend of mine, Patrick McCarthy, who is the CEO of Omni Health Care, which is headquartered in the city of Peterborough. We welcome him here today.

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

The House recessed from 1155 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my profound pleasure to introduce a city councillor from the city of Ottawa who represents Osgoode ward in the great riding of Nepean–Carleton: Councillor George Darouze. We all welcome you to this Assembly, and we hope you enjoy the OGRA/ROMA conference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody who chooses to be here instead of over there? Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to talk about the wpd Canada wind turbine project for my riding of Simcoe–Grey that was approved just a few days ago by the Liberals. These turbines are a safety hazard for pilots and passengers using the Collingwood Regional Airport. They are located right next door.

The eight wind turbines are 500 feet in height—almost as high as the TD office tower here in downtown Toronto—and, at 2.1 nautical miles from the airport, they are a threat to pilots taking off and landing. A plane taking off will reach the first two turbines in a matter of seconds.

The environment minister says that NAV Canada didn't have any concerns about these turbines, but the pilots using the Collingwood airport certainly do. These are pilots who have flown all types of aircraft all over the world. They don't take the matter lightly, and neither should the Liberals.

The local airport board and local municipalities don't want these wind turbines. They aren't wanted for safety reasons, and they aren't wanted because they will negatively impact the economy. This includes future investment at the airport and on neighbouring lands.

Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why the government is putting the lives of people at risk. These turbines are a bad idea. I'm calling on the government once again to do the right thing and put a stop to this lunacy today before someone is killed. It's not a matter of if that will happen, Mr. Speaker; it's a matter of when.

LONDON PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to speak about something that is very important to me and to the thousands of people in my hometown.

Today, like many members, I attended the OGRA/ROMA conference with a delegation from London including our mayor and two city councillors. They spoke to me about how the city of London is entering a new chapter in our history, one that is focused on improving mobility options for residents.

For those of you who don't know, London, Ontario is the largest city in Canada without a rapid transit system. A hallmark initiative of the city of London's plan is the Shift rapid transit plan. Londoners of all stripes agree that transportation mobility is a pillar of the future success of our city.

The Shift initiative is about finding environmentally sustainable ways to move people in London faster and create a great place to live and work. It focuses on rapid transit, along with cars, buses, bikes and pedestrians, as part of a transportation system that will help our city grow and prosper, and it's about developing the foundations to make London attractive for investment.

Our mayor appeared before the legislative finance committee to share that transit use in London has nearly doubled since 1998, and continues to grow.

London is ready to put its money on the table, and voted unanimously to support this important development.

To the Minister of Transportation: The city of London needs a provincial funding partner, and we are asking if we can count on this government to support this vital transit program in the coming budget.

ROYAL VICTORIA REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: On February 11, the Royal Victoria health centre in my riding of Barrie opened its doors to welcome families and visitors 24/7 as part of its new family presence policy. This change from traditional visiting hours to open visitation is an important step forward in patient- and family-centred care at the health centre.

At RVH, family is considered part of the care team because, as president and CEO Janice Skot says, "No one knows our patients better than their loved ones."

Janice went on to say, "Making the transition to open visiting hours is the right thing to do for our patients. Every patient has a right to expect the best possible experience while at RVH."

Research shows that in addition to a positive patient experience, the presence and involvement of loved ones contributes to better care, fewer medication errors and falls, lower rates for readmission and a decrease in emergency department visits following discharge.

RVH first decided to develop a family presence policy based on the input it received from its patient family advisory council.

Former MP Ed Harper had first-hand experience with this policy. Ed's wife, Rosemary, was in the RVH for the last two months of her life, and Ed rarely left her side. Ed did what he could to help the care team, and they were great in allowing him to stay with Rosemary. It meant so

much to both of them. He knew that other patients and families could benefit from the same support.

I'm very proud to represent amazing people like these leaders from Barrie who are putting patients first.

STU SCHWARTZ

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This week, we will take time in this assembly to support anti-bullying measures. Like many of my colleagues, tomorrow I will wear pink in support. But today, I ask all members of this esteemed assembly to give thoughts and good wishes to one of Ontario's most passionate anti-bullying activists, Stuntman Stu Schwartz.

Over the years, I have worked with Stuntman Stu on a number of initiatives in Ottawa. He's effectively the most well-known Ottawa booster. He is the trainer of his son's hockey team. Stu is also a workaholic. He is a relentless community champion who attends charity functions by the dozen each week. He uses his good name and his celebrity to boost food banks, our local hospitals, and his #NoMoreBullies campaign. He's a fighter, and he has taken up the cause of Colin's Army, supporting 12-year-old Colin Gillespie in his fight against cancer.

Which is why it is so cruel that Connie's husband, and Matteo and Isabella's dad, was diagnosed this past week with leukemia. Stu has been incredible throughout this entire ordeal, documenting his chemotherapy, his newly shaved face and all of the visitors that he has been receiving at the Ottawa Hospital. He has so many fans at Majic 100 and as the official voice of the Ottawa Senators as our PA announcer. We are all with him in that journey.

Everyone in Ottawa wants to help Stu because Stu helps everyone in Ottawa, and right now he needs our support as he stands up against one of the biggest bullies of all—cancer. So, on behalf of all of his friends, fans and neighbours in Nepean–Carleton and throughout the rest of Ottawa, I want him to know that we are all part of #StuStrong and he will beat this bully, with us by his side.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today, I rise on behalf of my community of Windsor West. This month, people living in Windsor and Essex county welcomed the announcement of 1,200 new hires at our Fiat Chrysler assembly plant, along with an additional 100 apprenticeships indentured by Chrysler Canada. I am proud to say that 10% of these apprenticeships are positions held by women. This is encouraging news for the current and future production workers and skilled tradespeople, their families, as well as the greater community, noting the spinoff jobs at the feeder plants.

It's not surprising that Fiat Chrysler would see the value of investing in Windsor with the high productivity, world-class safety standards, highly skilled workforce and dedication of the unionized production workers and skilled trades workforce at the Windsor auto plant.

What is disappointing, Speaker, is that the Premier and her Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure were quick to take the credit rather than recognize the key role those employees played in securing a new investment, which resulted in the recent hiring announcement of 1,200 jobs.

While this government applauds itself for a job well done, their freeze on hospital funding, resulting in the elimination of 169 registered nursing positions at Windsor Regional Hospital, removing care for families in their most vulnerable moments—this is what the Liberal government should take responsibility for, but, not surprisingly, they continue to deny cuts to front-line health care in Windsor and across Ontario.

Ontario families want a government that understands their priorities and gives credit where credit is due, rather than one set on playing politics.

1510

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: On Saturday, February 20, Yvan Baker of Etobicoke Centre and I co-hosted the 11th annual Etobicoke government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall. This annual event offers constituents of both ridings, and those visiting from outside as well, an opportunity to learn more about the many services offered by the province of Ontario and also by various non-profit and for-profit agencies and community organizations that service Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre. This year we attracted over 3,000 visitors to the fair.

More than 120 exhibitors from government ministries and institutions, local agencies and community organizations set up at the mall to showcase what they do, connect residents with the resources that they need, and generally make us more aware of the initiatives and local activities in our community.

For me, it's a valuable time to meet with constituents, listen to their concerns and be able to refer them directly to the services that they need.

There's also fun and entertainment, from trying out the lawn bowling greens to taking in the sounds of the Etobicoke Philharmonic Orchestra and the Etobicoke Community Concert Band.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the organizations and the volunteers that worked hard on Saturday to get this information out to our community. We're already looking forward to the 2017 government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall, and I welcome all my fellow MPPs who might wish to join us.

RURAL ONTARIO

Ms. Laurie Scott: A few weeks ago, I was invited to attend Peterborough county council to hear some of their concerns. They made it absolutely clear that life is becoming increasingly unaffordable for families in rural communities like those in Peterborough county.

Ron Gerow, mayor of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen township, said that the province is overlooking the needs of rural Ontario and that the Premier has lost her focus when it comes to rural Ontario. They deserve to be heard about how rising hydro rates are putting people into poverty, forcing businesses to downsize or close, the rising costs of policing on their small municipal budgets, and the lack of action in building new long-term-care beds to accommodate their growing senior population.

Mayor Gerow stated that the wait-list in the Peterborough area for long-term care has jumped from 950 people five years ago to 2,700 people today. Mayor Gerow's township has a spot for a new long-term-care facility to be built. He's asked the Premier to come by and see this spot. He's asked the minister responsible for long-term care to address this horrendous wait-list. There is no action. He is passionate. This is horrendous and needs to be dealt with. If this government does not deal with this, I hope that the minister from Peterborough actually goes to the Premier and demands this action now.

ErinoakKids

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today and speak about the recent groundbreaking on the new Oakville ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development.

I had the pleasure of joining several of my colleagues recently to help announce this milestone redevelopment project. ErinoakKids offers a wide variety of crucial services for children and youth with a range of disabilities and special needs. From medical care to speech and autism therapy, ErinoakKids will be able to provide our communities with the services and opportunities kids and their families need. I know that in my riding of Halton, many families rely on ErinoakKids, and this redevelopment will go a long way toward improving access and delivery of services.

In fact, perhaps the best part of this announcement was hearing the kids themselves talk about the important and real impact this facility will have on their lives. It was moving to hear their personal stories.

Once completed, ErinoakKids will have new facilities, not only in Oakville, but also in Mississauga and Brampton. It's the right thing to do. This will allow them to provide better coordinated care for as many as 5,600 children and youth in my area. In fact, this project will more than double the amount of treatment and therapy space.

I'm proud to say that our government is providing 100% of the funds needed to purchase the land and build all three facilities. I'd like to congratulate the leadership of ErinoakKids for their hard work on this project and for their dedication to the families they serve.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. John Fraser: Hier, la première ministre de l'Ontario a présenté des excuses à tous les Franco-Ontariens dont la famille et les communautés ont souffert

à cause du règlement 17. Le règlement 17 représente une période sombre de notre histoire que nous ne voulons pas voir resurgir.

En 1912, le règlement 17 a interdit l'utilisation de la langue française comme langue d'enseignement ou de communication dans les écoles primaires au-delà de la deuxième année, ce qui autorisait seulement une heure par jour pour l'enseignement du français comme sujet dans les écoles primaires. De nombreux enseignants ont résisté et ont continué d'enseigner en français malgré les fortes pénalités pour les infractions aux dispositions du règlement 17.

La communauté franco-ontarienne est fière et riche en histoire dans notre province et ceci est quelque chose qui vaut d'être célébré.

J'aimerais remercier le député de Sudbury pour avoir présenté cette résolution, ainsi que la ministre des Affaires francophones pour ses efforts inlassables pour protéger et promouvoir la culture francophone en Ontario.

Un grand merci à Denis Constantineau pour avoir soulevé cette injustice qui a été faite aux Franco-Ontariens.

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

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 February 23, 2016, 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

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE ET LA RESPONSABILISATION EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 167, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en matière de privatisations et de

partenariats public-privé et modifiant la Loi de 2008 sur la négociation collective dans les collèges.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: This bill increases the transparency and public accountability of the decision-making process of a public sector entity in the broader public sector that privatizes services or that uses a public-private partnership to procure goods, services or construction for a major capital project. The bill ensures that all privatizations and P3 projects above a certain threshold are assessed both on the basis of value-for-money criteria as well as broader public interest criteria.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding membership of a standing committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

The deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee: that on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, be replaced by Mr. Coe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley moves that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committee: that on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, be replaced by Mr. Coe.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I heard Mr. Coe say yes.

1520

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a number of local signatures coming in, courtesy of area petitions.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician

services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I am in agreement with the sentiment of that statement, and I affix my signature.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention”—in fact, dog bites have skyrocketed since breed-specific legislation was made law;

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

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

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

I couldn’t agree more. I’ll add my signature to the thousands and give it to Luke to be delivered.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition for ending the vacant commercial property rebate program in the province of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the city of Toronto has established and forwarded to the province of Ontario their interest in modifying or removing the vacant commercial property tax rebate; and

“Whereas there are millions of dollars in tax revenue being lost that could alleviate problems of homelessness, food security and other local issues; and

“Whereas the tax rebate is widely acknowledged as contributing to the preponderance of empty storefronts in our community; and

“Whereas the tax rebate is widely acknowledged as contributing to the lack of interest or necessity among landlords in lowering commercial lease rates in our community; and

“Whereas there is no evidence that the rebate is being used to improve commercial properties; and

“Whereas the ultimate decision to amend or end the vacant commercial property tax rebate ultimately lies with the province of Ontario;

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

“That the Minister of Finance amend the current provincial legislation in order to allow the city of Toronto to amend or remove the vacant commercial property tax rebate with the goal of encouraging landlords to actively seek tenants and stimulating the local economy.”

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, affix my name to it, and give it to page Owen to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that

protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, affix my signature and will send it with page Julia.

ELDER ABUSE

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

“Whereas today, there are more seniors 65 and over than children under the age of 15, both in Ontario and across Canada;

“Whereas there are currently more than two million seniors aged 65 and over—approximately 15% of the population and this number is expected to double in the next 25 years;

“Whereas Elder Abuse Ontario stated that between 40,000 and 200,000 seniors living in Ontario experienced or are experiencing elder abuse;

“Whereas research showed that abuse against seniors takes many forms and is often perpetrated by family members;

“Whereas financial and emotional abuse are the most frequently reported elder abuse cases;

“Whereas current Ontario legislation incorporates the Residents’ Bill of Rights, mandates abuse prevention, investigation and reporting of seniors living in either long-term-care facilities or retirement homes;

“Whereas the majority of the seniors currently and in the future live in the community;

“Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will ensure seniors living in the community have the same protection and support as those seniors living in long-term-care facilities and retirement homes;

“Whereas Bill 148, if passed, will require regulated health professionals to report elder abuse or neglect to the public guardian and trustee office;

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

“That the members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly pass Bill 148, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, requiring regulated health professionals to report any reasonable suspicion that a senior living in the community is being abused or neglected to the public guardian and trustee office.”

Mr. Speaker, I support the petition. I will give my petition to page Delaney.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

I support this petition, am pleased to affix my name to it, and give it to page Owen to take to the table.

MISSING PERSONS

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

“Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

We should just get this done. I will affix my signature.

REALTORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I also have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

“Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

“Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations.”

1530

It’s a great idea. I attach my signature and leave it with page Erin.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

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

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

EDUCATION FUNDING

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

“Whereas provincial underfunding for the Toronto District School Board is estimated to exceed \$109 million this school year;

“Whereas education development charges are fees levied against developers of new residential units and used by school boards to fund growth-related education land costs;

“Whereas school boards operating below capacity are not eligible to collect education development charges and EDC revenues may only be used for the purchase and upgrading of new land;

“Whereas the TDSB urgently needs more funds to finance infrastructure requirements to accommodate new growth, and developers should be contributing to these costs;

“Whereas the TDSB could generate nearly \$300 million in EDC revenues to support essential infrastructure needs;

“Whereas the requirements of the current legislation do not allow the Toronto District School Board to collect education development charges;

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

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly amend the Education Act to allow all school boards to access education development charges revenues and to enable school boards to apply EDC funds to school capital and site-related costs.”

I agree, sign this and give it to Delaney to be delivered to the table.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This petition is for increased rights for the descendants of adoptees in the province in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas adoptees have a right to information about their biological parents; and

“Whereas there are thousands of former adoptees who have had children or grandchildren in the province of Ontario, and

“Whereas an increasing number of illnesses and conditions can be identified, managed and treated through genetic screening and better understanding of family history; and

“Whereas the descendants of adoptees currently do not have the same rights as adoptees in the province of Ontario;

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

“That the government of Ontario amend the current provincial legislation in order to provide the descendants of adoptees the same rights to information about their biological ancestors as those available to adoptees themselves.”

I agree with this, will put my name to it and give it to page Richard.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

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

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: You know, Speaker, they can heckle me all they want, but these are citizens of Ontario who are petitioning our assembly.

I'm pleased to sign this petition, and I'm going to send it to the table with page Owen, regardless of the heckles that are coming from the other side.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Where were you when we raised PSWs—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care come to order? This is very inappropriate during petitions.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve.”

Interjections.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, the other side is still heckling even after they were told to pay attention.

I support this petition and I will send it to the table with page Tristan.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative”—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “Whereas Ontario's growing”—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Just hang on a second. I did recognize the member for Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My apologies.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: And that would be me.

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

“(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

“(2) Return to the bargaining table with the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) to resume negotiations for a fair physician services agreement;

“(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Ontario.”

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Dhruv to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate the opportunity to read this petition, a very important petition to the Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come”—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Eglinton-Lawrence, come to order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —“and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care”—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy House leader, come to order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —“return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I support this petition, sign it and give it to page Delaney to deliver to the table.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: In all my years here—not as many as the member for St. Catharines. I understand the emotion that takes place in this House and affects the decorum sometimes, but to have members—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. I would ask the member to state his point of order quickly.

Mr. John Yakabuski: To have the members of the government—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO’S FIRST RESPONDERS ACT (POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER), 2016

LOI DE 2016 D’APPUI AUX PREMIERS INTERVENANTS DE L’ONTARIO (ÉTAT DE STRESS POST-TRAUMATIQUE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 22, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to posttraumatic stress disorder / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l’assurance contre les accidents du travail et la Loi sur le ministère du Travail relativement à l’état de stress post-traumatique.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: Oh, yes. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You’re too busy heckling.

Mr. Mike Colle: Yes, I’m sort of shocked. I can’t believe the NDP is going so far right.

But anyway, listen, this bill is about not only our first responders, who initiated this bill because of the trauma they witness on a regular basis, 24/7—our firefighters, our EMS people, our correctional services—but I think this raises awareness about the whole issue of trauma in the workplace. That’s got to be taken more seriously. I think more support has got to be given to people through the WSIB and in all workplaces so that people who, in the line of duty, are confronted with these tragic, traumatic experiences are given the support, the counselling and the emotional recognition they need so they can get back to work and perform their duties without having to go through this inquisition when something does happen, which is the way things are right now, because they have to prove that they have post-traumatic stress disorder.

1540

This is a big step forward that will enable these first responders all across our province to continue their work and get the help they need and, in many cases, the preventive measures needed so that these traumatic instances will not affect them in their work.

Mr. Speaker, these awful things happen and our first responders are there, so we need to support them when they are there. That’s what this bill does, and that’s why I’m supportive of this bill.

I appreciate the comments of the member from Welland, who put this forward.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Over here.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Rotation.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The government side will get another chance to do a question and comment, and I look forward to hearing from the member for St. Catharines at that time.

I certainly do want to respond to the member for Welland, who spoke about Bill 163 yesterday afternoon. I was in the House to hear her speech, and she spoke about the impact of these kinds of traumatic incidents on nurses, especially in emergency departments. I thought her points were very well put and very well taken. She also gave acknowledgement and credit to her colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park for the work that she has done on this issue over a number of years, and certainly we would want to acknowledge that as well. There has been a lot of work done by—if I can use her name—Cheri DiNovo, the member for Parkdale–High Park, who has worked very passionately and effectively to raise the issue of the need to respond better to first responders who are suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder.

I think it’s also appropriate to point out that our leader, the member for Simcoe North, has been a vocal advocate for this kind of legislation as well. In fact, one of the very

first questions he asked in this Legislature, after he assumed his seat in the fall, was to call upon the government to expedite the debate on Ms. DiNovo's bill. In question period, he said, "Firefighters, paramedics and police officers see things we never want to see. Post-traumatic stress disorder is real, and help needs to be immediate." He said that on September 14, 2015.

Later on that fall, in question period, he said this: "It has been 72 days since I asked the Premier to work with me and the NDP to fast-track the third party's bill that would enable faster access to PTSD support for first responders. Will the Premier bring back this bill for third reading and pass it today, not a watered-down version of a government bill? Do the right thing: Show all firefighters here today that the government stands behind them...."

I've got more quotes, Mr. Speaker. Our leader has done a lot on this issue too, and we commend him for his support for our first responders in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Welland. She spoke for 20 minutes on this important piece of legislation, and there's a major piece that she addressed that we need to be very cognizant of, because it needs to be corrected, and that is the fact that nurses are missing from this piece of legislation.

On page 4 of the bill, you have full-time and part-time volunteer firefighters—as there should be—fire investigators, police officers, members of First Nations emergency response teams, paramedics, emergency medical attendants, communications officers, workers in a correctional institute—I was very happy to see that because the mayor of Thunder Bay, in our budget consultation, called the correctional facility in Thunder Bay a rathole; that's how bad it is in Thunder Bay—workers in a place of secure custody or place of secure temporary detention. This is a good list, but it's missing nurses.

What the member from Welland addressed yesterday is that according to a 2005 national study from StatsCan, 34% of nurses surveyed reported being physically assaulted by a patient in the previous year, and 47% reported experiencing emotional abuse. For those working in psychiatry and mental health settings, 70% of nurses reported experiencing emotional abuse.

It took the member from Parkdale–High Park so long to get this government to this place. The Minister of Labour, to his credit, has crafted a piece of legislation that is comprehensive—except that it is missing a major component that needs to be fixed. We need to ensure that nurses and the rights of nurses to access post-traumatic stress resources and counselling are part of the equation. That was the major point that the member from Welland made.

I hope that the government is listening because we don't need to go around again. We don't need another committee. We don't need another working group. We know how to fix this. Let's get it done.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Because the time is limited when members are making their speeches, they don't always have time to include the quotes about the legislation. I want to help the member out with some of the quotes that I see here from different people.

Geoff MacBride, president of the Ontario Paramedic Association, says, "This is a timely and responsible decision and we applaud Minister Flynn and Minister Naqvi in supporting our community and those who continue to suffer. It is no secret that first responders have a higher incidence rate to suffer PTSD, and we must make the proper steps to prevent and treat those that need it."

The firefighters' association, OPFFA, press release says, "On February 18, the province introduced legislation that recognizes post-traumatic stress as an occupational illness among firefighters and other first responders, which will make it easier for those suffering from post-traumatic stress to access workers' compensation benefits and proper treatment. The legislation will benefit the 11,000 members of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association ... and thousands of other first responders in Canada's largest province."

The SEIU had the following to say: "Yesterday, the Ontario government introduced legislation that would acknowledge that PTSD ... is work-related. This is a significant moment for SEIU Healthcare members. If passed, this legislation would allow first responders (including SEIU Healthcare paramedics) who suffer from PTSD to be eligible for WSIB.

"SEIU Healthcare paramedics have been strategically working with our partners and the government to raise awareness for this serious issue."

I know the member didn't have enough time in her speech to include all those quotes, so I wanted to help out by being able to share with the House the quotes from independent people about this progressive piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member from Welland. You have two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: First, I want to thank our first responders—police, EMS, firefighters—some of whom are with us today in the House, for the work that they do, day in and day out, to protect us. Mr. Bradley: I thank him for his comments. I've certainly heard the same from others. The members from Eglinton–Lawrence, Wellington–Halton Hills and Kitchener–Waterloo: Thank you for all your comments.

But I have also heard, since my 20-minute debate yesterday, from a number of people who have been left out. I want to start by saying the member from Parkdale–High Park has worked on this bill for eight years. The NDP has brought this bill forward five times. The original bill only included the three first responders, and that was to get this issue into the forefront. The government has now tabled the legislation. We're glad to

hear that. My comments are not to take away from anything that our first responders do.

However, I have heard from bailiffs in corrections. I have heard from probation and parole officers. I've certainly heard from nurses. And I've heard from construction workers in the last 24 hours, being that there are 80 deaths—tragic, traumatic deaths—per year in this province, a 36% increase. Those people often witness the traumatic death of somebody who falls 40 storeys here in Toronto, when they're building condos.

We need to expand this legislation. We are in no way wanting to hold it up, but certainly, when we get to committee, we want to have the opportunity to actually tell the stories of these other workers who also experience trauma, some day in and day out, such as nurses in our system, particularly in the areas of mental health and in the emergency department.

We thank the government for bringing it forward and we look forward to committee.

1550

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

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to start out by recognizing some very special people here with us today in the gallery. I'd like to recognize Bruce Chapman, of the PAO; Chris Hoffman, of the OPPA; Stephen Reid, with the PAO; and Ernie Thorne, with the OPFFA. Welcome to Queen's Park and thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to you know that I'll be sharing my time today with the member for Scarborough–Agincourt, the member from Ottawa–Orléans and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

I am pleased to rise today and speak about an important issue that affects our first responders: post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm proud our government is supporting our first responders through Bill 163, the PTSD act. I know the Minister of Labour has worked tirelessly for the last year to determine the best possible ways to assist those diagnosed with PTSD.

When we are hurt or in danger, we turn to our first responders for help. They protect us, guide us and are often responsible for saving our lives. So it is only right that we should help them in return when they need it.

The Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, if passed, will provide them with a sense of security and support. It creates a presumption that a diagnosis of PTSD is a direct result of the worker's employment. This presumption makes sure it's not the responsibility of first responders to prove their PTSD, which is something we know can lead to even further stress and delay in treatment. Instead, the changes proposed in this bill would lead to faster access to benefits through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and proper medical care.

During my years as a journalist, I saw first-hand the harsh realities our first responders have to deal with on a daily basis, whether it's a stabbing victim, a child injured in an accident or victims of violence. Mr. Speaker, I was able to turn away, but I know our first responders were not able to turn away at times.

I have spoken with first responders in the riding of Halton about this very issue—police officers, firefighters, EMS—and they've described to me just how debilitating PTSD is and how difficult it can be to get help.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is defined as being caused by a traumatic event that is outside the normal realm of human experience. This includes assault, torture, combat, severe car accidents and so much more. These people never know what they're going to be walking into and what they may wind up seeing.

Most of us can't even imagine what it's like to experience such an event, but our first responders are faced with it on a regular basis. It could be a police officer in a life-threatening situation, a firefighter pulling people from a burning house or a 911 operator helping people through a tragic event.

We're also talking about correctional officers, who go to work every day to the highly emotionally charged and physical job of managing our prisons. In Halton, we have a large number of correctional service employees working at the Maplehurst Correctional Complex and the Vanier Centre for Women. I've seen their tears. I've heard from them first-hand just how difficult their jobs are and how quickly it can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. It can be a very challenging and emotional situation to be in. That's why I'm proud that our government is working hard to help them.

Some of the symptoms of PTSD include anxiety, depression, flashbacks and feelings of guilt. Without treatment, they can get worse over time. The amendments to Bill 163 have the ability to improve the lives of the people who have been diagnosed and of their loved ones.

Bill 163 will also help prevent first responders from getting PTSD in the first place, through an awareness campaign and research grants. If passed, the amendments will offer peace of mind for first responders in Halton and across Ontario. This is not only good for them but also for their families, for Ontario residents and our communities.

I'm proud our government is taking these necessary steps and I am confident we can all come together to ensure the passage of the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act and help our first responders lead healthy lives. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise this afternoon to support Bill 163. I'm very pleased that some of our first responders are here today. Welcome, again.

But more importantly, before I became a member of provincial Parliament, I was a registered nurse, so this particular piece of legislation is actually, as my predecessor, Gerry Phillips, would have said, the right thing to do.

There are a couple of pieces here, for those watching at home. PTSD is a significant health risk for workers, especially front-line workers, in the workplace. I would actually call it a workplace hazard. There is enough

research out there that shows that first responders are twice as likely as the general population to develop or suffer from PTSD.

There were comments made by my colleague from Welland, who herself was a nurse before, expressing concerns about one category, nurses, not being covered in this proposed legislation, Bill 163. I would say that when this particular bill goes to committee, I would cover all health professionals, because we do have physicians working in ERs who will be suffering from PTSD. They too will be experiencing this kind of workplace-related mental health issue.

The other piece about the proposed legislation is that, if passed, it would provide comprehensive support. I know the opposition members have criticized our government with regard to taking so long for the bill to move forward. I want to remind the members opposite that the minister, under his leadership, has a comprehensive strategy, beginning with an education and awareness campaign from radio to digital media and leadership summits on particular issues dealing with PTSD. The minister is developing tool kits as a resource to help first responders deal with this thing, but also employers, as well as their colleagues and their families, because this is not just the first responders experiencing PTSD; it's the entire first responder community. As well, there will be research and grants to support this kind of research, because we know that through research we can improve care and support.

The other piece of the proposed legislation that I want to spend my limited time on—because I could spend hours talking about this proposed legislation—is section 10 of the proposed bill, specifically dealing with time limits. The proposed legislation talks about the 24-month transitional period when the legislation comes into effect, that if the first responder retires and has not yet experienced PTSD, they will be affected and will be able to benefit from this proposed legislation.

We know that first responders or any other health professionals who experience stress or mental health issues do not experience those symptoms immediately after a traumatic experience. It will take time. Through these time limits, it will allow the first responders, including—I think the member opposite mentioned correctional workers earlier. I also want to remind the members opposite that workers in correctional institutions also include those working directly in health care. There are nurses who work in correctional services who are providing assessment and treatment, monitoring, evaluating and providing medications. It is clearly defined in the proposed legislation.

The other piece of the legislation that the members opposite have not spoken about is the communication officers. When you need first responders, guess who you call. You call 911. When 911 goes through the process of answering the call, they too experience potential PTSD.

So I'm very pleased that the proposed legislation covers 12 groups. Absolutely, the comments made by the member from Welland about registered nurses—I would

say that we need to expand to physicians, nurses and those who are working in ER. They should be included in the proposed legislation.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this particular bill, Bill 163. I also want to encourage everyone in the House to move this proposed legislation to committee very soon so that we can have further discussion and enhance the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I recognize the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

1600

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is a bill I'm very proud to see before this House. Many of us in this House served in municipal government. Some of us have been mayors. I think any of us who have been a mayor have made regular visits to hospitals when paramedics, firefighters or police officers—first responders—have been wounded or shot. The trauma on them and on their families or those who have witnessed horrific events that most of us don't see—we really remember those moments very soberingly. I remember, in my days when I was mayor of Winnipeg, the amount of violence sometimes that young men and women—sometimes older men and women who served in uniform—saw was something that I have seen people struggle with, the rest of their lives, to reconcile.

PTSD doesn't just have one victim in the person who is impacted so terribly. Again, for those of us who have been in local government and have watched families try to cope with the impact of PTSD on family—young men or women or people in their police, fire or paramedic career getting up in the middle of the night, not being able to sleep, not being able to have a functional relationship with their children—as a father and a grandfather, I can't imagine how hard it would be to deal with something knowing that I wasn't well, not having something that could be solved by surgery or taking a pill. The path to recovery would be so extraordinarily complex and personally difficult that I would often find myself uncomfortable or embarrassed by my behaviour, feeling guilty for how I responded, not being able to support my partner or loved one or have the kind of relationship that you'd want to have with your children.

There are few diseases, Mr. Speaker, that are as cruel as this to the person involved and as hard to recover from. I watch that, and I am really glad that we're taking this so seriously, because I think the other challenge here is the great collapse of services for veterans. My partner, Rick, whom I'm very proud of, served as a young man who was gay in the Canadian Armed Forces before it was legally recognized, when you would get kicked out of the armed forces. He served, knowing that, on the front lines of conflicts in the Canadian navy. I know, from his circle of friends, how many of the young men and women he served with overseas in those years had complexity in their lives because of the multiple impacts of trying to survive in a community where your relationship with the person you love, if discovered, would mean that you lose

your job. At the same time, you're supporting comrades in arms who are often wounded or are often hurt.

I'm glad that we live in a country where our human rights have advanced to where we don't have to ask people to pretend to be something they're not. Our new defence minister, I think, is a shining example of the kind of openness and the kind of celebration of human diversity that we now have.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a constituency. I would like to make this appeal to my colleagues in the House. I didn't have much luck with the former Minister of Veterans Affairs, but to the current Minister of Veterans Affairs I am writing letters. We've got hundreds of young men and women in uniform who come back with PTSD and have no residential services. If you want to meet them, you just walk from here to my home in the Distillery District and you can't help but notice.

I had a community meeting, and I had some of my residents complaining about these violent street people and hobos and bums. I talked to Brother David down at the Good Shepherd. He estimates that of the 500 regulars they have in there every day, about 360 of them are young returning vets. They're on the street, and we should be embarrassed by that. We don't have the access to veterans affairs to get the kinds of support. We don't have the specially designed programs. They're falling between the cracks.

I'm fortunate that my partner, Rick, came back from his military service having been able to cope and get the support. He works as an operating room nurse right now. I know that our nurses in Ontario are very well supported. More work has to be done there, but our nurses are very well supported. He has often commented on the difference between his time as a nurse and his time as military personnel and the kinds of challenges that we have. That's not to underestimate the challenges that nurses have. God knows, he's an operating room nurse so he deals with trauma all the time.

There is no group of folks right now within the public sector who have the impact that first responders do. I'm hoping that once we get through this, we will also be big-hearted enough to try to engage with the national government to get better solutions for vets and look at other high-impacted professions that are impacted by this.

This is such a hard thing. It's such a hard thing. In my life, I have never seen a disease more difficult to cope with than PTSD, because it is not just like you're sick and you have a condition, you have a lesion, you have cancer—something that people can understand. Those diseases evoke empathy and understanding. It's hard when you act out in a violent way, or when you or someone in the neighbourhood becomes despised because you beat your neighbour up—which has happened in my constituency—because you have a mental illness and crisis in your life, often as a result of serving your community, of being the police officer who stands between us and bullets, the firefighter who rescues us or that young man or woman overseas who is on the front lines who sees something that few people can survive emotionally or psychologically.

I hope this is the beginning. I hope we move beyond that. I hope that we also look at other professions that are engaged in this.

I want to thank all the members, because I think there are members in every party in this House who at one point, since I've sat here, have raised this issue. I hope this is something where, when we all retire from this place, we will view our support for this bill as one of the prouder moments we had.

But let's not forget that we have a lot of work, both federally and provincially and with those organizations, to do a lot more for men and women in uniform in our hospitals, on our streets and in our communities. Thank you very much, and God bless.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I know that I only have two minutes, and I want to make a few comments. I want to thank the government speakers, especially the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, for his comments. I think we can look at this bill with all-party support and look at it as a very positive step in our province. I'm speaking as someone who has a son who is a police officer in Edmonton. I know what he goes through every day that he puts the uniform on. I miss him, and I love him.

I'm glad to be able to provide some comments. I do have a letter, and I hope that at some other point I'll be able to put comments on the record as part of a longer debate. But I had a constituent who wrote to me last October who agreed that I could tell their story. I'm not going to name them, at their request. The letter they sent last October really outlined the frustrations, being a police officer for decades and the challenge they had to get their PTSD recognized. I'm just going to read you a couple of excerpts:

"I filed a WSIB application at the beginning of August, with the assistance of my doctor and my psychologist. My doctor filled out the required forms, and my psychologist sent WSIB a 30-page report outlining my PTSD diagnosis, (which included several examples of traumatic calls that have affected me), as well as a treatment plan and a back-to-work plan.

"To date, I still do not have a decision from WSIB. I have run out of sick time and have been forced to apply for employment insurance, which is less than half of my normal take-home pay."

The letter goes on and talks about the hoops and hurdles that WSIB put forward to this person. It's a terrible tragedy when someone who goes to a doctor for help and goes through a workplace injury doesn't have recognition from the government.

I support this bill. I hope to tell their story at a later date during the debate. We all need to approve this. We all need to get it forward.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm incredibly proud to stand here today among my colleagues to work together in a

collaborative way to see that this bill becomes a reality for so many first responders in our province who have worked so hard and have dedicated their lives to promoting and ensuring that their colleagues have this protection. I want to thank them for their efforts.

I also want to thank those who currently serve and are suffering, and who have come out bravely to share their stories. I want to recognize and acknowledge those who have suffered and have succumbed to post-traumatic stress disorder.

We think of them. I think today, with this bill and our debate—more like a conversation—we honour their memory, we honour their service and we break down those barriers.

1610

So this bill, aside from the really valuable mechanics that it will have within the WSIB system for first responders to streamline that process, to recognize and to presume that PTSD was acquired on the job, what it will do is broader than that. It breaks down barriers for those in society who struggle with mental health issues—specifically, PTSD—and now can have a broader conversation: that their Legislature, their government, is taking it seriously and that they're acknowledging that we need to support people with PTSD.

Unfortunately, Speaker, it speaks to some broader problems in the system, specifically the WSIB. There are a whole host of people that we're leaving out, many of whom wouldn't be assumed to have contracted PTSD through their normal course of work, but yet are treated very unfairly through the system. I hope that this encourages the government to take a look at it overall and to ensure that we're doing the right thing for those who suffer.

Once again, congratulations. Thank you so much for your service.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the Minister of Labour and to the members debating this bill in the House today.

I want to rise to speak to this legislation because I want to reiterate a very important point: that first responders and emergency personnel are a key part of what keeps us, as Ontarians, safe, and that they deserve any support that we can give them.

I have a daughter who is a paramedic. She just started out in January. She's with York region. Every day she goes out there, I have an idea of some of the things that she'll be faced with, whether it's a motor vehicle accident, whether it's an overdose. I know that those are traumatic experiences for anyone. She's also taking up nursing and she'll be graduating in June—on June 5, to be exact—and I'm very proud of that aspect, as well.

Mr. Speaker, first responders put their lives on the line for others in times of distress, and we should be able to stand up for them in their distress and take care of them, as they take care of us when we need them.

Since becoming an MPP, I've had numerous meetings with the police association, firefighters and EMS first

responders from my riding. Although they have many concerns, the most important thing they usually talk about is post-traumatic stress disorder for their members.

That is why I think it's so important that we are giving them the respect they deserve. After acknowledging the existence of PTSD, from its historical origin in war trauma to the definition today, we are finally moving to a place where the presumption will be that PTSD, when diagnosed in first responders, is the result of their employment.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to respond to the speeches that were just given by the government members: the member for Halton, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Clearly, I think there's an emerging consensus in this House that this bill, Bill 163, is a good bill that should pass into law. There has been a lot of credit given to a number of members who have been involved in this issue over the years: certainly the member for Parkdale—High Park. Our leader, the member for Simcoe North, the Leader of the Opposition, has been vocally in support of moving forward with this kind of legislation. But I also want to acknowledge the efforts of the member for Simcoe—Grey, who has, over the years, been very supportive of first responders in his community and across the province. He served with distinction as Leader of the Opposition—and interim leader of our party, but he was officially the Leader of the Opposition—after the last election and did an outstanding job.

I know that in his conversations with first responders last year, in particular the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, he spoke about this issue very eloquently and passionately, calling upon the provincial government to move forward quickly with legislation with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder for first responders.

Again, on all sides of the House we see a considerable amount of support for the principle of this bill, and a belief that the bill must pass. At the same time, I think there will be a number of members of this Legislature who will want to talk about the first responders in their communities and express their support for the bill, so there will be some debate on this. Of course, the normal process is the bill would go to a committee and there would be an opportunity for, at the least, clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, and perhaps some public hearings as well.

But again, I think it is appropriate to recognize the contributions of members of this House, and certainly the member for Simcoe—Grey has shown leadership on this issue and many others with respect to first responders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the government side. You have two minutes for response.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to hear that my colleagues from all three parties have supported Bill 163

in their comments today. I'm very, very pleased to hear that all three parties are supportive of the first responders but also, more importantly, supporting Ontarians who sacrifice their lives every day to serve Ontario. Because at the end of the day, what we do in this chamber is not just to ensure that legislation is current and progressive, but also, it has to be comprehensive.

As I said earlier, the proposed legislation, if passed—there are a number of pieces here. One is ensuring the WSIB will deal with this particular piece in making sure there are resources there, there's an educational campaign and there's research. But the other piece of the legislation, if passed, talks about working with employers. We want the employers to work with us, work with the WSIB, to find ways to prevent PTSD, because at the end of the day, how do you identify the issue if you already have it, potentially—but how do you prevent it? For those new students who are currently studying to become paramedics—as I heard from my colleague from Durham, young nurses out there, as well as those who are currently in training—how do we prevent PTSD?

We need to look at a comprehensive approach. This proposed legislation, under the leadership of the Minister of Labour, who has this proposed legislation—deal with the bill, but also all the resources that ensure their success.

The other piece is I want to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. I heard this afternoon's debate, but I know I heard previous debate on the proposed legislation as well. Everybody in this House does support different parts of the bill. There's parts of it we need to fine-tune; that's where we go to the committee.

I want to thank all the first responders who have come forward, all the family members who have come forward, or their colleagues. At the end of the day, we're only going to get better through this kind of legislation when everybody works together. So I want to so say thank you.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to finally have the opportunity to rise and debate a bill that will offer more support for our heroes with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Speaker, I want to take you back in time. The date was September 3, 1999. I was traveling from Chatham to Windsor, and suddenly, out of nowhere, around Manning Road, I came across fog that I had never seen in my life. It was a sheer white blanket of fog. I couldn't see 15 feet in front of me, and at that time I was travelling at about 115 kilometres per hour. According to the signs, I was over the speed limit, but on the other hand, they were going to let it go anyway; I'm sure they would have.

What I wanted to point out was suddenly, my eyes got as big as saucers. Everything seemed to slow down. Eventually, what happened was that particular day at that time was the largest vehicle accident in the history of Canadian motoring.

I recall pulling my car over to the side, getting out and rescuing a woman in the median. Neither one of us knew

where we were because the fog was so thick. We used my car as a shield for oncoming vehicles, vehicles from both sides that were coming at us.

I remember calling a local radio station to have them warn motorists of the accident that was happening—not happened. While I was on the phone, I remember the radio announcer saying, "Rick, what is that noise?" I said, "That is the sound of cars slamming into each other, behind me and in front of me."

1620

But this isn't about me. This is about the first responders who came to that accident. I still think about it, and I think of the first responders. They were heroes that day—police, fire, EMS, citizens—heroes that day.

I couldn't get myself to go back and listen to the screams of a young girl who was pinned in a vehicle as I saw a Lovers furniture truck burning up and then gas tanks starting to pop. She died in that vehicle.

I couldn't imagine what first responders felt like having seen an individual who was pinned between two cars. They couldn't get him out of the two cars that had wedged and pinned his legs, and he went up in flames before their very eyes.

I often wonder what happened to those first responders, because those men were heroes. But you never know the lasting effect that that traumatizing incident had, not only on their life at that moment, but could perhaps still be having on their lives today, almost 16 years later. I can only hope and pray that all first responders that day were able to get the necessary help that they needed, and to realize that you're a bigger person when you're able to talk about it and get it out.

But, Speaker, I must add and say to you that when I drive in fog today, heavy fog, I get flashbacks, and I proceed with extreme caution as well.

Dealing with legislation for PTSD here in the Ontario Legislature has been a long process. I'll show you how long this process has been. I'd like to review some of the history behind the issue.

Just a few weeks ago, instead of focusing on the issue itself, the Minister of Labour decided that it was appropriate to attack the opposition for the government's slow movement on the file. To quote the minister, he said, "I will note that in the history of civilization, the PC Party has raised this issue three times." It was a disappointingly partisan comment from the minister. I have a lot of respect for the minister; please, don't get me wrong. But this was a disappointing comment on such a crucial issue, given the fact that all three parties agree that we do need to address this problem. Worse yet, his statement wasn't even accurate. I had personally raised the issue on more than one occasion right here in question period. Surely the minister would be aware of questions on such a key issue to his portfolio.

Perhaps my memory was off, so I decided to look into some of the history on the issue. As we know, the member from Parkdale–High Park first introduced a private member's bill on PTSD way back in 2008. A good idea, Mr. Speaker, doesn't care who owns it, in my

opinion, which is why we, as official opposition and third party opposition, supported Bill 2 on PTSD and wanted it called forward.

Shortly after being elected as our new leader, and then the MPP for Simcoe North, Patrick Brown took the opportunity to call on the government to commit to passing the NDP's Bill 2. In our opinion, it was a good bill that gave first responders PTSD support. It didn't matter that a member's name from another party was on the cover. If it was missing something, as the government claimed, it could have easily been addressed in committee.

On September 14 of last year, during question period, Patrick Brown called on the government to get moving on the PTSD file and fast-track the NDP's Bill 2. No commitment was given.

Then, on October 6, I called on the government House leader, who just so happens to be the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, to call forward Bill 2. He's the one who decides which bills are brought before the committee, and he's the minister whose first responders need and deserve this help. I am obviously the critic to that, as you are as well the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

On December 2, I raised the question again: Why won't the government simply call Bill 2 forward? Why not improve it in committee?

Finally, most recently, the issue was brought up once again by our leader in two separate questions on February 16 of this year.

That's five questions raised by the official opposition alone on the topic in just part of last year and this year, which is certainly more than the misleading three times in the history of civilization claimed by the minister. That doesn't count for any statements or debate comments made by members.

To suggest that members in this House, no matter where they sit, do not care about the dangers first responders face is shameful. I understand, though, the heart of the Minister of Labour. It's a good heart, and he wants to see this passed, as we all do.

This is a non-partisan issue that clearly matters to each and every member in the House. We've all heard of emotional stories in our home ridings, and I know that we all take them to heart. Attempts to inject negativity into discussion and to try to make it artificially partisan only end up hurting the integrity of this Legislature, failing the citizens we have sworn a duty to serve.

As a deputy Speaker, I'm proud to say that I've seen many debates that bring out the best of every member in this House, where ideas and viewpoints are listened to and respected. We need to see more of that respect and less partisan games. The Legislature is at its best when we show genuine appreciation for the perspectives that members bring to the table, as we have seen through the debate on this bill.

Bill 163, at its core, is about taking action on a problem that has not been properly addressed and passed. Our first responders are struggling to maintain their mental

health and deserve more help. I want to take that one step further and say that their families want them to get that help as well. It's not just first responders who suffer but their families too, because they see a change in behaviour of their loved ones.

To understand why it's so important for us to come together and figure out a solution co-operatively, one must listen to the stories of first responders who have battled their own demons with PTSD.

OPP Sergeant Brian Knowler, who works out of the Chatham-Kent detachment—my area—has personally dealt with the issue we're discussing today, and he was kind enough to share that story with me and, more importantly, he shares that story with fellow officers. If even one person realizes that they, too, can conquer their demons after hearing some of the stories shared during the debate on this bill and others before it, that's a success.

Brian's story is ultimately a success story, but there were times when it seemed that there was no possibility of a happy ending. I'd like to take a moment and share with you and this Legislature Brian's story, and I'm going to say it in the first person because this is how he wrote it.

"In October of 2004, I was the first police officer on the scene of a fatal motor vehicle collision. The collision involved a minivan and a pickup truck. The minivan had rolled into the ditch and was almost destroyed with every piece of glass and plastic being broken out of it. The witnesses at the scene hadn't seen anyone move or climb out of it after it rolled. Based on what I was told when I arrived at the collision, things did not look good.

"When I arrived, I waded through a muddy ditch full of waist-high water to get to the van. I cut my palms and knees climbing into what was left of the vehicle and was met with the sight of a single male amongst all the debris, lying on his back with one hand out the door. He was bleeding from a severe wound to his throat and rapidly losing blood. I applied direct pressure to the wound and, in doing so, had to get almost face to face with the victim.

"When I got that close, I quickly realized that the driver, who was bleeding to death before my eyes, was a close friend from university. I began to use his name, asking him to hang on, to stick with me.

"At one point, he simply breathed his last and died in my arms as I was preparing to perform CPR. The paramedics who attended the scene ultimately did revive him, and he lived for a few days in an induced coma."

Sergeant Knowler goes on to say, "I spent the rest of the night at that scene and I also had the responsibility of telling his wife, who was just about to give birth to their son, that he had died and the circumstances surrounding it. It was the worst night of my career.

"In the days immediately following, I coped the way that many first responders cope with stress and trauma—with alcohol and a strong desire to bury the experience. I didn't get any aftercare at the time, didn't explore the experience and the feelings it created, didn't let anyone

know what I was going through. I tried with one officer, an old, crusty sergeant who was supposed to be mentoring me—his advice was simply that I should toughen up because that was life. So, I told myself it was part of the job, something that a cop should be able to deal with, and locked the demon of growing PTS away in a cage way back in my brain.

“Basically,” Sergeant Knowler went on to say, “I did everything wrong:

“—I never sought out any kind of debriefing or professional assistance;

“—I buried myself in my career, striving for promotions and accolades and seeking acceptance and redemption through success at work;

“—I systematically pushed away my family and friends, creating a bubble around myself, living with the fear, the guilt, the anger, and the despair. I cut myself off from the people who were in the best position to help me and turned to video games, the Internet and unhealthy addictions to cope;

“—At work I was cool, calm, put together. At home, I lost my temper, raised my voice, and was a less than ideal dad and husband. I equate it to masks. At work, I had one mask on that hid everything nice and neat and gave everyone the impression that I was in control. At home, my real face came out, and it was an ugly, hurtful thing. (It tears at my heart that my sons will have the memory of their dad during those years as being detached, angry and isolated. They deserved better and I have done everything I can to explain to them what PTS is and what it did to me, and to repair my relationship with them and my wife.);

“—For a while, just before I completely crashed, I turned to alcohol on a daily basis to cope. It was so much easier to feel drunk and numb than to deal with the blackness.”

Sergeant Knowler went on to say this:

“—At the end of 2011, I finally got into a spiral that ended with a complete breakdown and hitting rock bottom. I was burned out physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I contemplated suicide twice during this time.

“It took that total collapse to show me that something was wrong and that I needed professional help. I was at a place I thought I would never be at in my life—broken, battered, scared, and completely directionless.”

Here’s what he did to begin to climb out of that pit: He decided he wanted to fight. Finally admitting that he had a problem that needed to be fixed was probably the hardest step, but the most critical one in his healing process. He began seeing an excellent psychologist who specialized in PTSD treatment for first responders and those in the military. His time with her consisted mostly of cognitive and talk therapy, but it also included writing, reflecting, and coming to terms with the burden that he had been carrying around for so long.

His experiences with her were at turns enlightening, angering, sad and rewarding. He let the walls that he had built between himself and his friends and family fall

down, which led him to start to make amends and to rebuild relationships that he’d come close to destroying. He fought the battle of workmen’s compensation and got it. It was a long and complicated battle, but when he finally saw the letter with “Claim approved” written across it, the battle became worth every minute he had put into it.

He rebuilt his reputation at work and came out of the closet about his PTS. It started with a simple e-mail to his staff in support of the release of the Ontario Ombudsman’s report on PTS in policing, but led to becoming a very vocal advocate at his workplace. He began to help guide other officers through their own struggles with trauma and rebuilding their lives.

He requested and received a transfer to a different work location where his family would be more comfortable, even though it meant stepping back in rank from staff sergeant to sergeant, taking a pay cut and a cut in responsibilities and duties. He said that that turned out to be one of the best moves he’d ever made for himself and his family.

Now, a few years later, Brian is in a very good place. He has started speaking about his experiences in training both first responders and civilians about PTS, resiliency and getting through trauma with your mind and body intact. He writes regularly on issues around first responders and psychological health that have created an audience of both uniforms and civilians.

He’s enjoying work, and even though there are still some tough days, he has found new love for his job and has renewed pride in being a cop.

Sergeant Knowler finished the account of his story with an important message to all first responders:

“What I want people to take away from my story is that there is life after a PTS diagnosis, if you’re willing to fight for it. You can continue to do the job you love, you can rebuild your ties to family and friends, and you can actually become a greater, better person through tapping into strength you never knew you had.

“You can tame your demons.”

Sergeant Knowler also described the process of getting his claim processed and ultimately approved by WSIB. That’s an important insight into what first responders are currently going through.

He went on to say that when he first put in his claim, he was assigned a caseworker who walked him through the process and was responsible for collecting his information and assessing his claim. To get to that stage, he had to give a complete breakdown of what happened the night of Mike’s death, as well as recount pretty much every traumatic incident that he had been a part of since that night. That was a very difficult process, as it essentially made him relive not only Mike’s death but all the painful, awful things he has been privy to since then. He went back through the reporting system, and when he finally started to look, Brian was amazed at how many horrible things he had seen.

Speaker, the current system is really counterproductive. The first thing that we ask first responders who are

suffering to do is to painstakingly pore over every detail of the traumatic events that they have dealt with in their careers—with caseworkers, not doctors—before getting help. That would be like going to a hospital with a broken leg, only to be told that you need to run a marathon to prove that the leg is broken and then you'll get treatment.

Given how difficult it can be to address post-traumatic stress disorder once it is full-blown, it is incredibly important for early intervention resources and programs to be in place for first responders. In 2014, Chatham-Kent police launched their peer support team, comprised of six members: four sworn officers and two civilian members. Their training dealt with real-life scenarios that officers face on a regular basis.

By the way, Speaker, to interject for just a quick moment: I will be sharing my time with the member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

For Sergeant Gabe Tetrault, an investigation involving a child had a strong impact on his behaviour: "It was two years into (it) when I realized what was bothering me about the investigation. What emotionally was troubling me about it." It was only when he spoke to a chaplain during a ride-along that he realized just how important it was to talk about such incidents. He was asked what his hardest call was. He said, "In doing that, and kind of deciphering and tearing that down, I was able to say, 'Wow, there are a few incidents I need to deal with and talk about.'" Luckily, he was able to turn this into a positive, as he has encouraged his fellow officers to break the dam of silence.

The program is partly reactive and proactive. It's reactive in that it involves debriefings. When there's an incident, the unit goes out of its way to talk to the officer within a day or two. The group focused on recognizing the signs of someone dealing with PTSD, depression and indicators that would raise flags about another officer's suffering.

Chatham-Kent police also offer a police chaplain program. I've known chaplains over the years, and they're excellent. They help our police officers, especially when they need it most. They are well aware of PTSD, and without prying, they are often able to encourage officers to open up about their experiences.

Remember, it was a chaplain who first encouraged Sergeant Tetrault to talk about his traumatic experiences. Within only a few days of the program's launch, Tetrault received two calls from staff.

My office had the opportunity to speak with Constable Brent Milne about some of the other programs that the Chatham-Kent Police Service offer. The HELP Team was established by the Chatham-Kent Police Service in 2001. Its goal is to improve the outcomes of interactions between the mentally ill and the police.

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The HELP Team consists of police officers and support staff who receive extra training to deal with the mentally ill and who are partnered with local mental health agencies and support groups. The officers work

regular patrol duties but are available to handle calls for services involving the mentally ill.

The Chatham-Kent Police Service is rolling out a Road to Mental Readiness program through the Ontario Police College. The training program, developed by the Department of National Defence, was in fact adopted by the Ontario Police College as a way to improve the performance and mental health of officers. The Road to Mental Readiness training—they call it R2MR—also reduces barriers to care and encourages early access to care.

Initially, there will be an eight-hour course for police leaders, both sworn and civilian. Sometime in the spring, Chatham-Kent Police Service plans to roll out a four-hour Road to Mental Readiness program available for all employees. The program will teach employees about caution signs for mental illness issues, including PTSD, and coping mechanisms to deal with the issues.

Constable Milne noted that it would be nice to have resources for families as well. Family members, especially spouses, are critical members of the support system of our first responders. They know them better than anyone else, and it would be helpful to have some training resources available so that they too can know the warning signs to look out for.

Ultimately, the goal is to have help available for each first responder who needs it. But to get help you have to realize that you need it and that seeking help is okay. OPP Sergeant Brian Knowler has said that it is especially important for those in positions of leadership to show the issue is being taken seriously so more individuals will step forward and seek help. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength. And we, as legislators, in getting this bill passed, realize that and that it must continue, as well.

I'm incredibly proud to say that there is a deep respect and understanding of the mental health of all first responders in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

I know many of our friends in corrections will be following this bill closely and they may be listening in on debate. After speaking to many correctional officers and staff, I've learned that they do not have access to the types of programs that many first responders do. This is in spite of the fact that in a number of studies, corrections staff are either at the top of the list or close to it when it comes to the likelihood of suffering from PTSD.

As I've noted, many police services have taken the initiative to offer support programs and resources for their officers and staff. They are to be commended for their hard work. But if you happen to work in corrections, it's a different story. What I've heard is that you can talk to this person a few times, but it's basically a counselling session. This is very important, and it's great that this service is offered, but it's not enough. Access to a psychiatrist wait-list can be up to six months to a year, depending on where you are in the province. Additionally, those who eventually get an appointment find that only a portion of the cost is covered, leaving individuals to cover the rest of the cost, which could be well over \$100 per hour.

Well, if you want to properly address the problem of PTSD, you have to take health and safety concerns seriously. Correctional officers and staff wage a mental battle each and every day that they go to work, knowing that they will be, in fact, understaffed, that they won't have the resources required to perform their duties in safe conditions, and that the inmate population is being made up of more and more hostile individuals due to the province's over-reliance on lockdowns to cover for understaffing. These people are strong—that is, the correctional officers. They're strong, mentally as well as physically, but they're human, and they need help.

So much of what we discuss on this issue deals with trust. For a first responder to open up and share their feelings with peers or loved ones, trust must first be built. Just like any other support system, first responders—and I'm including correctional officers—need to know that their government is truly listening to their concerns and will act on their behalf as a committed partner. We cannot allow our first responders to lose faith in the province. If that happens, we run the risk of discouraging those who are suffering from stepping forward and starting that often long and painful road to recovery. We all need to show that we are committed.

So I'd like it take a moment, in conclusion, just to make a few key points here. As I begin to conclude my remarks, I would like to raise some of the questions that have been raised since the introduction of the bill. One of the most common questions that I hear, quite frankly, and I've heard it from front-line first responders: "Will this open the floodgates to PTSD claims?"

I understand the concern. However, presumptive legislation does not mean that you do not require any proof whatsoever that you're suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. You just don't get the check on PTSD once they approve it. It takes time. There's a check mark on a form that says "PTSD"; you don't just check it and say, "Well, that's it." A doctor will still have to confirm that you have PTSD, but now you will not have to go to WSIB and prove that the issue stems from events the workplace.

More questions that I've heard about Bill 163 include: Are civilian police and special constable employees covered by this bill? Why were probation and parole officers and provincial bailiffs left out of Bill 163?

There are certainly some concerns that we're going to hear about at committee from various stakeholder groups, and it's my sincere hope that all relevant stakeholders will be able to say that their voices were heard at the end of the day.

Given how long the road to getting the government to commit to supporting PTSD legislation—beyond second reading, that is—as legislators, it is our duty to ensure we get it right. With that, Speaker, I'll turn it over to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills to continue along in debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Daiene Vernile): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity this

afternoon to speak to this important debate on Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to posttraumatic stress disorder. I speak following my good friend and colleague the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex, who also serves as our caucus's critic for the Ministry of Community Safety and does an outstanding job.

As the leadoff speakers for our caucus, I think, together, we're beginning the debate—although it started yesterday, as matter of fact. We had to stand down the debate for the leadoff speeches because I was in the chair yesterday, and I think he's going to be taking the chair again shortly. The fact is that we're all doing double duty these days, it seems. We are pleased, though, to be able to participate in a meaningful way in this particular debate.

This is important legislation that the government has introduced. I should point out that it was only introduced for first reading last Thursday. It was called for debate yesterday and today. I think it's clear that the government intends to proceed with relatively swift consideration of this bill. Certainly, on our side of the House, we believe that this is legislation whose time has come, and we would hope to see it considered on the fast track.

This bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. The new section 14 in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, provides that certain workers who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder are entitled to benefits for that disorder under the act if certain conditions are met. The section creates a presumption that post-traumatic stress disorder in those workers arises out of, and in the course of, the workers' employment, unless the contrary is shown. The bill sets out procedural and transactional rules governing claims under the new section.

The bill amends the Ministry of Labour Act to allow the minister to collect information relating to the prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder in certain workplaces. That's really a summary of what the bill is intended to do.

During the course of this debate, we've heard from a number of members who have spoken about their support for the first responders in their communities. I'm privileged to be here today first and foremost representing the people of Wellington–Halton Hills. I am pleased to have the chance to express my admiration and my appreciation for, and the outstanding devotion that I have to, the first responders in my constituency. I've had the opportunity to work with particularly our volunteer firefighters through the years, but I think of the ambulance attendants and I think of the police officers and everyone who worked so hard to help the people in my constituency, when they call 911 and the emergency response that takes place.

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During the course of my tenure in this Legislature, I've had the opportunity to bring forward a number of bills to support, in particular, as I said, our volunteer

firefighters. The very first private member's bill that I had that was actually passed into law was in 1994, during the tenure of the New Democratic Party government. My bill amended the Highway Traffic Act to allow volunteer firefighters to use flashing green lights on their personal vehicles while they were travelling to and from an emergency. I was pleased that the government of the day saw fit, even though I was sitting in the opposition, to allow that bill to pass into law.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in rural Ontario, if you see the flashing green light on a vehicle, you know that that's a volunteer firefighter who is trying to get to an emergency. It's something that I know that our fire services have found to be very helpful.

In the late 1990s, when our party was in government, I introduced a private member's bill to support our volunteer firefighters with respect to workers' compensation legislation, which would—the bill, had it been passed—have enabled the municipalities, who are the employers of the volunteer or, as we often call them, part-time firefighters, to purchase the highest level of workers' compensation coverage for their firefighters. The bill was not passed into law, but I was pleased that, shortly after I introduced the bill and advocated for it, the government of the day—the Honourable Jim Flaherty, actually, as Minister of Labour, introduced an identical government bill, which was absolutely the same as my bill except it, of course, had the minister's name on it instead of the backbencher's name. But the fact is, it was introduced as a government bill and it was passed into law, the very same bill that I had introduced. So I was very pleased about that, obviously.

In 2002, I brought forward legislation to support two-hatter firefighters. That became a very controversial issue, but at the same time, it was supported by the Fire Fighters' Association of Ontario, which was the volunteer firefighters association; the fire chiefs association; AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; and many volunteer firefighters across the province who supported the legislation. That bill did not pass into law, but it was actually the longest debate of any private member's bill in the history of the Ontario Legislature in terms of the hours of debate. Of course, last year, the government brought in legislation which in some way has provided the legislative protection for two-hatter firefighters that I had sought so long ago in 2002. So I was very pleased about that.

I know that in 2007 the provincial Liberal government—Steve Peters at the time was the Minister of Labour—brought forward Bill 221, which was the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act (Presumptions for Firefighters), 2007. That bill received first, second and third reading on the very same day. It was on May 3, 2007, that it was introduced. My colleague the member for Simcoe–Grey was our party's labour critic at that time. He stood up and he actually sought the unanimous consent of the House to allow the bill to be called for second and third reading the same day, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, the rules of the House don't

normally provide for that. It requires the unanimous consent of every single member to agree to that happening. I think the government was surprised that we had done this—sought the immediate passage of the bill—but they went along with it. I think it's to the credit of the member for Simcoe–Grey that it happened. The fact is, it was passed into law.

It became apparent, shortly thereafter, that the government, even though they had committed to extending that same presumptive legislation to the volunteer fire service, appeared to be dragging their heels in terms of adding that regulatory change. So I brought forward another private member's bill calling upon the government to do this and tried to draw attention to the fact that it had been—I think it took two years, or maybe two and a half years—I'd have to double-check—before the government finally included the volunteer firefighters in that presumptive legislation.

So I've had a lot of issues, and I've been honoured, really, by the Fire Fighters' Association of Ontario with honorary membership in their organization, so I feel a sense of fraternity with the firefighters in rural Ontario and the volunteer firefighters across the province, and I certainly do appreciate everything that they do. They do an outstanding job in our communities; I can't say enough.

Getting back to the bill, we're told that this PTSD legislation is part of the government's overall strategy to support first responders. It's not just this bill, of course. The government has a broader prevention strategy that they've talked about, to ensure that our first responders have adequate support with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as we commonly call it in the Legislature. Of course, part of the strategy is this particular bill, Bill 163, the amendment to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and the Ministry of Labour Act. Also, the government, I think, has quite correctly looked at this in a broader sense, and their broader strategy includes a public awareness campaign to increase awareness and reduce the stigma.

As we know from our conversations with many of the first responders, there is, to some degree, a stigma attached to post-traumatic stress disorder. In some cases, people who are experiencing it are just told to suck it up, so to speak. Maybe I shouldn't have used that term, but that's what I hear they're told: to deal with it their own way. Unfortunately, there isn't adequate support for them. By reducing the stigma, we would, hopefully, bring it into the open and show greater compassion for the victims, and in turn give them greater support such that they can overcome the illness.

Part two of the government's initiative is an annual leadership summit that the minister tells us he's going to have, to highlight best practices, recognize leaders and monitor progress. I don't know when that first summit is going to be held, but I would encourage the minister, if he is going to do this, to move forward with it forthwith and, hopefully, involve other members of the Legislature who might be interested in attending and participating, and not just make it a partisan thing.

Number three is the PTSD resource tool kit that the government talks about, a free electronic resource provided by the Public Services Health and Safety Association, with content tailored to meet the needs of employers and first responder sectors. Again, that appears to be a website to raise awareness and promote best practices. The government is also committing to support research, to provide grants for research that supports the prevention of PTSD—because of course part of the initiative of the government has to be to help the people who are currently diagnosed with PTSD, but surely they should be making great efforts to prevent PTSD. Through greater counselling and support in the workplace, we would hope we could reduce the incidence of the illness.

We know that PTSD can develop following exposure to one or more traumatic events. Our first responders are on the front lines of car accidents, fires, all kinds of emergencies, and in some cases responding to violent acts. The symptoms are often debilitating and may include: intrusive thoughts—re-experiencing and re-imagining what has happened and what the individual has seen; avoidance; negative change in cognitive ability and mood; and increased reactivity and arousal. For example, a person might be very quick-tempered.

These mental illnesses or conditions can be quite debilitating, depending on their severity.

We know that first responders are at least twice as likely as the general population to suffer from PTSD, due to the risk of frequent exposure to traumatic stressors. That should give us all reason to pause and to consider what we're going to do. Obviously, if it's twice as bad for first responders, clearly there's an issue and we need to respond to it. I think that's an important point to make.

There is a manual which helps medical specialists—psychologists and psychiatrists—to diagnose PTSD. Diagnostic manual number 5, which is the fifth edition, states, “Rates of PTSD are higher among veterans and others whose vocation increases the risk of traumatic exposure....” That would include not just include war veterans, but also first responders, I would argue, Mr. Speaker, and I think you would agree.

Other studies similarly indicate that first responders have a higher likelihood to suffer PTSD due to the risk of routine exposure to traumatic stressors in daily work, with rates as high as 27% in some sectors. That's significant, too, Mr. Speaker, and I think it needs to be considered.

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We also are told that there is research that shows that PTSD results in more suicide attempts than any other anxiety disorder. That again indicates the severity of the problem in many people. According to statistics that were compiled by Tema Conter with respect to Canada, almost half of first responder suicides over the last few years have been in Ontario. Of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we comprise approximately 40% of the Canadian population, and yet we seem to be overrepresented in this tragic number of suicides with regard to first responders.

We know that the Minister of Labour held a round table on work-related traumatic mental stress in 2012 and that that was really when the government started to study this issue. Now, 2012 is about four years away, so it's been a long time coming, and while we would in a general sense encourage the government to consult on important issues and make sure they get the facts right, it would seem that government should move more quickly on very sensitive issues like this where people are involved in the way they are. I think it's disappointing that it has taken almost four years for us to get to this point, but here we are.

They also followed up their consultations with a summit on work-related traumatic mental stress last year, and during these discussions with labour and employee representatives, as well as mental health experts, there was a consensus, I'm told, that prevention is critical with respect to PTSD; there was a consensus around that point.

There are also, I think, from time to time questions about cost, and we know that the human and economic costs associated with traumatic stress are already significant and include increased absenteeism or resignation from work, increased use of medical services, health deterioration, marriage breakdown and even suicide.

A few months ago, I had an opportunity to speak with a number of former police officers who came to see me in my temporary office that I have in the community of Georgetown. There were four or five of them, and each one, in turn, told me their personal story about the struggle they have had with PTSD. In every case, they had lost their wives. They had lost their families. They had declared bankruptcy. It was one problem after another. They all told me that they had struggled with substance abuse. In every case, they related it back to their problem with PTSD. It was a very, very difficult meeting to listen to. I listened to them probably for 90 minutes that Friday, along with a staff person, and after they left, I said to my assistant, “Clearly there's an issue here that needs to be dealt with and we need to get behind this effort.” I think it was Cheri DiNovo, or I should say the member for Parkdale–High Park, who had introduced a number of bills over a period of years with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. There was a high level of awareness amongst many in the first responder community that her efforts were being brought to the floor of the House and this was the focus of the discussion. But I'll never forget that meeting. It was very, very tough to hear these stories, and I wanted to do what I could to help.

We also know that the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center has identified that for people seeking treatment for substance use disorders, it is estimated that nearly one in three is suffering symptoms of PTSD, again reinforcing what I had heard at that meeting. It wasn't a study, but real-life examples of how people had to try and deal with the problem.

There's a general agreement, of course, that PTSD can be prevented or mitigated, given appropriate supports and

timely treatment. Again, that goes back to the summit on work-related traumatic mental stress that I referred to earlier, where there is a belief amongst professionals and those who have studied this issue very carefully that, through greater efforts at prevention, we can make a big difference. Again, we would urge the government to include that in their overall strategy.

There have been two Ombudsman reports that have focused on the need to address traumatic mental stress: the 2012 provincial Ombudsman's report on the OPP and the 2015 Toronto ombudsman's report on Toronto Paramedic Services. I'm told both reports stress the need to do more to help workers suffering from psychological injuries.

Again, with respect to prevention, I think it's important to point out that we need to ensure that there's support for effective prevention for first responders. We know that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board enters the picture once an injury has occurred, but an effective prevention strategy would reduce the numbers of people who are suffering from PTSD. Obviously, that would be better for everyone in the long run. However, when indeed someone has been diagnosed with PTSD, certainly the WSIB needs to be there to ensure that they have quick access to treatment and other supports.

Right now, the WSIB does in fact recognize and acknowledge PTSD as an illness, but currently, to be eligible for entitlements to WSIB benefits for mental stress, the WSIB requires an acute reaction to a sudden or unexpected traumatic event, or a reaction to a series of sudden and unexpected traumatic events arising in the course of employment. But under the WSIB's current adjudication process, pre-Bill 163, the burden of proof is on the worker to establish the work-relatedness of the disorder.

Again, the WSIB adjudicators currently would identify that a sudden and unexpected traumatic event or reaction to a series of sudden and unexpected traumatic events occurred, and the adjudicators must obtain all relevant evidence on non-work stressors and traumatic events to assess work-relatedness. With this bill, if it's established that the first responder has PTSD, it is presumed that it's work-related—and that is really the crux of this legislation—without putting the onus of proof on the claimant.

Mr. Speaker, we see that the government has a strategy to deal with PTSD and respond to it beyond this legislation. We'll be monitoring that carefully to ensure that whatever the minister has committed to they in fact follow through on.

The Ministry of Labour, of course, is introducing with Bill 163 these amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to establish a legislated presumption for first responders. Workers are already entitled to benefits for work-related traumatic mental stress; however, a presumption would help expedite treatment, recovery and return to work for those with PTSD. Under presumption, if a worker covered under the presumption is diagnosed with PTSD, it would be presumed to be work-related and the worker's claim would be accepted.

I also want to point out that there is an amendment to the Ministry of Labour Act as part of this bill. This amendment to the Ministry of Labour Act empowers the minister with a new power to direct broader public sector employers to provide specified information to support the prevention of PTSD in first responders. I know that the minister in his comments when the debate initiated yesterday was quite proud of this, because, I gather, he was directly involved in including that in the legislation. His hope is that by making these plans compulsory and making them public, there will basically be a competition to rise to the top in terms of standards, and that best practices will be shared. I'm sure that's a good thing.

It's also important to point out that other jurisdictions in the country have led the way with respect to responses for PTSD. Actually, the province of Alberta—under, I believe, a Progressive Conservative government, if I'm not mistaken—in 2012 became the first province to provide PTSD presumption for emergency responders: firefighters, emergency medical technicians, police officers and sheriffs. Again, that was four years ago; it's now 2016. That says something, I think, about the Progressive Conservative commitment to this issue across the country.

We also note that on January 1, New Year's Day of this year, the province of Manitoba provided a PTSD presumption for all workers who face a traumatic event or series of events in their work. That came into effect, as I said, last month.

1710

Other provinces are looking at this issue, and bills on presumptive legislation for first responders are being considered, I'm told, in the Yukon territory and in the province of New Brunswick. In Nova Scotia, there's a private member's bill that's been tabled along the lines of what has been proposed here with Bill 163, as I understand it. In Saskatchewan, there are public hearings and consultations on PTSD in emergency medical workers, with a report due this year. But again, I think it's worthwhile to note that it was, in fact, a Progressive Conservative government in the province of Ontario that led the way and was the first one to introduce legislation and pass it.

I want to bring to the attention of the House information that was brought to me by my colleague the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, who received a call from, I believe, a former auxiliary officer of the OPP. He had asked that these concerns be brought forward during the course of this debate. I'm not sure if I have his permission to use his name, so I'm not going to use his name, but it's a real person who contacted the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka's office.

He asked two questions—again, I know that there are ministry staff monitoring this debate, and I would hope that they will give us written answers on these questions: Why is it that auxiliary officers are not included in this initiative; and also asking and expressing the concern that legislation should be retroactive for five to seven years, due to the fact that this legislation has been on the table

since approximately 2009. Not this particular bill, but the intent of this legislation has been before the House.

Another constituent that I want to talk about with respect to this debate—and this gentleman has, in fact, given our office permission to use his name. His name is Norman Traversy and he lives in the community of Erin in my riding of Wellington–Halton Hills. He has been speaking publicly about this issue in terms of his experience with PTSD. In fact, I remember he let me know that he was going to be on the Roy Green radio show one Sunday afternoon, and I had a chance to listen in. He's very articulate. I just want to relay his story to you, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of the members of the House.

He wrote very recently to the new president and CEO of the WSIB, and he said this:

"I listened with interest to CBC's Ontario Today show this afternoon, and heard your comments regarding the way the WSIB assesses worker injury claims. I commend you for appearing on the show and listening and responding to the callers' complaints. At one point in the show you spoke about the WSIB's medical consultants, doctors and nurses, and how they are utilized in assessing claims. I know that you have only been on the job for three weeks, but this is definitely not the way the WSIB assesses claims. In my case, and in the case of countless other claimants, medical assessments were unlawfully made by untrained, unqualified, laypersons. These were adjudicators who had no business medically assessing claimants and subsequently making medical diagnoses. In doing so these adjudicators ignored the diagnoses of qualified medical practitioners, sometimes with fatal results for a claimant.

"Toronto police constable Darius Garda was one such person. He was diagnosed with job-related PTSD by mental health professionals. The WSIB ignored this diagnosis and denied him help. He fell into financial ruin and, on February 4 of this year, he drowned himself in Toronto harbour. I'm convinced that if the WSIB had followed its own procedures and properly assessed this person, he would be alive today.

"My case is similar to Constable Garda's. I was a professional firefighter with the Mississauga fire department. I have been diagnosed with job-related PTSD by six qualified mental health professionals—psychiatrists and psychologists. There have been no dissenting opinions from any other doctors. The WSIB adjudicator ignored these diagnoses and unlawfully issued his own. He said that I did not have PTSD; I had 'traumatic mental stress,' which at the time was not compensable.

"The WSIAT went one better; without consulting any quality mental health professionals, they said that I did not have PTSD or traumatic mental stress (because it was now compensable); what I had was, in fact, socio-economic stress (the same condition that killed Constable Garda). This unlawful behaviour is, on its face, ludicrous and deadly.

"Your predecessor and the Minister of Labour are aware of this. I wrote to the minister about this state of affairs last September."

Mr. Speaker, I would add that Mr. Traversy has written many letters to me as his MPP and to ministers of labour, and I have followed up on his behalf and spoken directly to the Minister of Labour about this particular constituent and his issues. So I would certainly confirm that he has written numerous letter—very well-worded, well-written letters, I might add—talking about his particular experience with this terrible affliction.

I'll go back to his letter:

"Ten first responders have committed suicide in the first six weeks of this year. These were preventable deaths. This is a serious public health issue that must be addressed.

"On the CBC radio show, you stated that the WSIB was investigating whether claims were being properly assessed from a medical point of view. I know that the OFL and the Ontario Ombudsman are also doing this. Please investigate and review my claim. It was not properly assessed, my medical information was completely ignored, I was not treated professionally or courteously and the WSIB hearing process made my PTSD worse.

"As part of the appeals process, I know that the WSIB can reconsider and re-adjudicate a claim at any time it sees fit to do so. You have the power and the authority to do the right thing. I appeal to your common decency to end the 10 years of misery that I and my family have endured. I don't know how much more I can take."

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a letter that went to the new president and CEO of the WSIB, dated February 17, just a few days ago. I would ask the Minister of Labour to look into this matter and see what he can do to help.

I'm running out of time, but I also had a meeting very recently with another first responder suffering with PTSD. He asked me to keep his name in confidence, and I would certainly respect that. I wrote to the Minister of Labour shortly after that meeting—we met just a few days ago, and I wrote to the minister on February 18. I said this to the minister:

"I met with a constituent who is a former firefighter who is struggling with PTSD. As you know, PTSD can be serious and debilitating. I was glad when your government recently announced a new PTSD strategy for first responders....

"I am aware that you are bringing forward legislation to ensure that first responders have access to treatment for PTSD. As you prepare to introduce this new legislation, I want to share with you an excerpt from an e-mail my constituent sent me following this meeting:

"Consider making each service responsible to get information out regarding PTSD and how and where to get help to all past employees. Also, they should make an effort to reach out to and learn from those who have been in the battle. Asking past employees why they left? Have they since been diagnosed with PTSD? Did they make a WSIB claim (and when most say no, ask why)? Ask about their family life, finances, substance dependency, if they are presently working...."

Mr. Speaker, I gather that I'm out of time. But certainly, I want to conclude with the support of our caucus for

this bill. We will be voting for it when this debate concludes, and we look toward to participating at committee as this bill continues to make its way through the legislative process.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to offer some thoughts on the comments that were provided to us today by the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex and the member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Certainly, we welcome Bill 163. New Democrats have been pushing for this kind of legislation, under the leadership of our colleague the MPP for Parkdale-High Park, for at least seven years. The member for Parkdale-High Park did not let up in her advocacy. She introduced five private member's bills, raised this issue on numerous occasions in this place and pushed to make sure that these changes were introduced in this province.

This legislation is long overdue, Speaker. We need to show the support that our first responders deserve for the injuries they experience working on our behalf, making our lives safe in the work that they do.

1720

We know, Speaker—there is indisputable evidence—about the impact of trauma on a person's physical well-being. We know that there is a much higher incidence of police officers dying by suicide because of the trauma that they experience during the work that they do. This legislation will recognize that trauma as a work-related injury, and it will allow them to be compensated and their families to be compensated, which is just one small, small thing that we can do to recognize the service that these men and women have provided for our communities.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: The Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, if passed, would provide a sense of security to Ontario's first responders, including Barrie firefighter Cory Mainprize and his members, as well as the members of the Barrie police force and paramedics.

It will create a presumption that PTSD diagnosed in first responders is a result of a worker's employment. This ensures that first responders will not have to go through the process of proving their PTSD, which we know can lead to further stress and delay in treatment. We want to make sure that those who need help get it, and get it as soon as they can. Expedited adjudication will enable faster access to compensation and proper treatment, ultimately supporting recovery outcomes.

However, just creating a presumption that PTSD in first responders is a result of a worker's employment is not enough. As former speakers have said, we have to find ways to implement preventive solutions as well. I think the minister has worked very hard on this bill to make sure that we are trying to act on those issues as well. If passed, this bill will permit the Minister of Labour to request prevention plans from affected em-

ployers. I think that's one of the most important parts of the bill. We have to find a way to deal with the number of people who get PTSD.

I'm very proud of the part our government is taking in this issue, that they took the time to write the proper piece of legislation as part of a comprehensive plan, and that we took time to get it right. I urge you to support this.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It was a pleasure to listen to the leads from my colleagues from both Chatham-Kent-Essex and Wellington-Halton Hills.

Before I became an MPP, I had a meeting with Vince Savoia. Many of you in this chamber probably are aware of Vince and his work at the Tema trust and Heroes Are Human. He gave a very compelling reason why PTSD and this legislation is so critically important.

My work on the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions showed how long it takes people to seek out the help. When I hear now that individuals who are over in the Whitby area dealing with Ontario Shores after they reach out and look for help are being asked to wait for up to a year to get any kind of treatment, to me is such an indictment of what we need to do and how we can serve better.

We have to understand that individuals who are suffering are not coming forward the day after a traumatic incident. It takes time. It takes time for them to admit they need the help and it takes time for them to seek out where that help can be. Quite frankly, a lot of our first responders don't want to admit that there is an issue and to seek help. So to think that after they've gone through all of that and then to be told that they have to wait for a year—it speaks to the treatment aspect of this legislation and how this is a good first step, but it is, in fact, a first step.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I was pleased to listen to your debate on this bill, as well as our colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills. You referenced, at the beginning of your speech, the tragic accident on the 401 in the 1990s.

You think about that day: There probably wasn't a first responder who wasn't called to that location on the 401 to support and help the victims of that accident. In fact, in a small community like Windsor and Essex county and in Chatham, it's hard to know somebody who wasn't affected or involved in that

It speaks to the vital role that our first responders play and the need for us, as community leaders and as a community, to rally around them to give them the support they need to continue to do that job. This is one more component, one more tool in the toolbox to deliver that support.

I'm excited to get this bill passed and to let our constituents know that this exists now. I'm sure that it will infuse a measure of pride, maybe even in this institution, because it has been a long time coming that we see

something positive come out of this place for people who really deserve it. That's something that I think we should all be proud of.

I certainly want to commend my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park, who has continued to fight this fight in tandem with first responders, who have been relentless in getting government action on this. It's a really proud day to be here today.

When I was first elected in 2011, I learned about the issue, I learned about the bill and I had the chance to meet first responders. One I want to give a shout-out to is Natalie Harris. She's a paramedic. You can follow her on Twitter; it's ParamedicNat1. She has a blog as well. She has played a vital role informing everyone, but also breaking down those barriers about her own journey and healing through PTSD. I'm just really proud to have met her and her colleagues. I'm proud to stand here on this day to see this bill become reality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for final comments.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members for London West, Barrie, Dufferin–Caledon and Essex for their responses to our speeches. Mr. Speaker, you led off this debate. Again, I would like to emphasize that you, in your role as our critic for community safety, led off this debate in terms of our critic's response. That underlines and underscores our caucus's concern for our first responders. I thought you gave a fine speech, so well done.

I want to respond quickly to the member for Dufferin–Caledon. I think she's too modest. Her very first question in the Ontario Legislature after her election was related to an issue involving the fire service in her community. That shows her interest, obviously, in the fire service as well as in all first responders, I believe, in her constituency and across the province.

She did an outstanding job with the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, through 18 months of public hearings, deliberations and report writing. Those recommendations were part of an all-party consensus effort, where we came together as members to try to work together to confirm a strategy, and I think a very fine example of cross-party co-operation, something that we need to be doing more of around this place on issues where we can work together.

She emphasized the fact, based on her experience with those hearings, that many people who experience a mental health disorder struggle with it for a long time before they eventually seek help. It's unacceptable that people would have to wait up to a year to receive the treatment that they need, even the initial assessments in some cases. It's obviously a very serious problem and we need to be doing more. I think, in a broader sense, the government has an obligation and responsibility to respond to all of those recommendations in that report as part of their ongoing mental health strategy.

Again, I want to thank the members for responding to our comments and reiterate that our caucus is supportive

of this bill and our party's leader, Patrick Brown, is very supportive as well.

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

M^{me} Lisa Gretzky: Il me fait plaisir d'intervenir au nom de mes électeurs de Windsor West et de participer au débat sur le projet de loi 163.

Primarily, this bill seeks to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act to presume that first responders who sustain post-traumatic stress acquired the illness on the job. In other words, when first responders are diagnosed with PTSD, they would not have to prove that their job caused the trauma.

1730

Post-traumatic stress disorder, as defined by the Canadian Mental Health Association, is an anxiety disorder characterized by reliving a psychologically traumatic situation. Often, this is experienced through flashbacks, nightmares and intense feelings of terror. People who experience PTSD may withdraw from family and friends as a result of their symptoms.

Imagine, just for a moment, that you went through an intensely traumatic situation and then were forced to relive that experience while you slept or, in some cases, those who suffer from PTSD are robbed of the ability to sleep. Imagine that these symptoms cause you to withdraw from your loved ones, frustrating those who care about you the most.

Unfortunately, too many of our first responders don't have to imagine this. They live the symptoms of PTSD each and every day. These are the women and men who, every day, run towards danger when you or I would run away, and work to keep us alive and safe. We ask so much of these dedicated professionals, and I'm proud that today we can start asking just a little bit less.

The intent of this bill recognizes that traumatic situations occur each and every day in the lives of our first responders when they're working in our communities across Ontario. First responders who suffer from PTSD deserve the utmost access to care but are forced through a painstaking process to prove that post-traumatic stress was obtained while serving the public. They must prove a causal link between their post-traumatic stress and a workplace event.

Speaker, let's take a look at the diagnostic requirements the WSIB outlines for someone to prove this causal link. According to WSIB, "In order to consider entitlement for traumatic mental stress, a decision-maker must identify that a sudden and unexpected traumatic event occurred. A traumatic event may be a result of a criminal act, harassment, or a horrific accident, and may involve actual or threatened death or serious harm against the worker, a co-worker, a worker's family member, or others...."

"The worker must have suffered or witnessed the traumatic event first-hand, or heard the traumatic event first-hand through direct contact with the traumatized individual(s) (e.g. speaking with a victim(s) on the radio or telephone as the traumatic event is occurring)."

Right now, we are forcing people with an illness that causes them to relive traumatic events to go through a process of thinking through and filling out forms pertaining to these events. Is this system re-traumatizing those it is meant to help? Of course it is. It doesn't make sense that when those people are injured by trauma that they've witnessed, we force them to go through the very same lengthy process as the rest of us to get compensation for PTSD.

The bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act to presume that first responders who sustain post-traumatic stress acquired the illness on the job. This presumption would ease the process for receiving benefits for first responders. This bill will help first responders come forward and get the necessary treatment quickly to heal as best as possible and get back to work. These professions not only have elevated rates of PTSD, but many first responders find it difficult to seek the help that they need. They are tough people, and it can be difficult for them to ask others for help.

The proposed legislation is also similar to an Ontario law passed in 2007 affecting firefighters who develop any of eight types of cancers.

Any costs associated with work-related claims are paid by the WSIB. Employers pay WSIB premiums. As such, employers indirectly pay the costs of all WSIB claims. As PTSD is already an occupational illness covered under WSIB policy in Ontario, it is not anticipated that the number of claims received will change significantly with presumptive legislation for first responders. It is also not anticipated that any additional successful claims will have any significant overall impact on employer premiums. The sooner we can provide assistance for people living with PTSD, the sooner they can start living with their illness, repair family relationships and get some relief from their experiences.

There are some very positive items in this bill. I'm proud to say that it was my colleague from Parkdale-High Park who introduced this legislation nearly eight years ago for the first time and has brought it forward four more times since then. I think we owe a lot to her dedication and perseverance on this issue. Certainly, given her lead remarks on this bill in the chamber yesterday, we get a sense of the strong impact that first responders have had on her life, and I would like to thank my colleague for her work on this legislation and her forward thinking.

I can't help but think how far ahead we would have been on this issue had the government adopted her initial legislation. Seven years ago, we could have had a framework to expedite WSIB claims for emergency responders, and we could have built on this throughout the years. Seven years ago, this government had a chance to make Ontario a leader in creating laws that are sensitive to the emergency responders living with PTSD. This government had the opportunity to adopt a bill proposed by New Democrats and make our province a leader in assisting first responders with PTSD. Imagine

the difference this would have made in people's lives had the legislation been passed nearly a decade ago, when my colleague from Parkdale-High Park was pleading.

Since taking office, I have had a steady stream of constituents writing to demonstrate their support for the work of my colleague and the bill before us—with amendments, of course. One constituent writes, "Please help us prevent any more deaths among such a vulnerable and valiant group of helpers in our communities. Please support paramedics, police officers, firefighters, communication officers etc. across Ontario and support Bill 2," which is what it was called at the time they were sending me messages.

Waiting to act on this issue is a missed opportunity for our province. We are finally debating similar legislation today. The provisions outlined in the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) expand coverage to include first responders and other workers: firefighters—full-time, part-time and volunteer; fire investigators; paramedics; communications officers; emergency medical attendants; police officers; workers in correctional institutions; emergency dispatchers; and workers in a place of secure custody or secure temporary detention. It also explicitly includes members of a First Nation emergency response team.

Speaker, I think it's important to understand the roles that these professionals play in our lives. Firefighters in Windsor and across Ontario are dedicated professionals we depend on each and every day. According to the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, among the 11,000 full-time firefighters, approximately 30 have been diagnosed with PTSD.

I've met with many of the firefighters in my community, toured their facilities, and listened to their stories about life on the job and even their own experiences with first responders. I'd like to share a story that was shared with me by one of our local firefighters. He's a captain, and I won't share his name because I didn't get consent to share his name. But he told me a very touching story about when he was a child. He had a traumatic incident where he was injured, he was burned, and the firefighters came to his aid. There was a firefighter who, as traumatic as it would be to see a child burned, managed to comfort this particular gentleman, who remembers how kind and how considerate this firefighter was. That was what prompted him to then later become a firefighter himself.

Paramedics, ambulance communications officers, and emergency medical attendants and dispatch operators: According to the Tema Conter Memorial Trust, research estimates the prevalence of PTSD within paramedics as between 16% and 24%. Remember that these professionals are tasked with emergency medical care and witness some very traumatic scenes as a result.

As you spoke to earlier, Speaker, and my colleague from Essex also touched on it in the two minutes that he had to speak, I remember in 1999 when all of southwestern Ontario was devastated by an 87-car pileup on the 401 near Windsor. In fact, I believe it was right near the Manning Road turnoff, which would be in my

colleague's riding of Essex. It was a horrific accident, and I remember watching the reports coming in while I was at work at the time. I remember thinking about who first received the emergency request for assistance, and then thinking about the paramedics and other emergency professionals and first response personnel who would need to treat the injured in this accident. As you touched on, Speaker, this was a horrific accident. It was very thick fog, and when you see pictures of the accident that day, although we did lose some people, it's amazing that more lives were not lost. I can just imagine, if I can remember vividly what happened, what it must be like for the first responders who showed up to help the people that day.

1740

Police officers suffer higher rates of physical injuries and psychological injuries compared to the general population. One study indicates that 15% of police officers may experience PTSD compared to anywhere from 1% to 8% of the general population, but it's the narratives and shared personal experiences that truly illustrate what these professionals go through.

At one point, I thought maybe I'd want to be a nurse and then I realized that really wasn't a job for me because, unfortunately, nurses lose patients. Then I thought maybe I'd like to be a paramedic and then I realized, 'Well, they often lose patients too.' Sometimes they come up on accident scenes, and I'm really not equipped myself, I don't think, to deal with something like that.

I was speaking to an OPP officer who was a patient in the dental office I worked in at the time. We were going back and forth discussing a few things, and he started to recount some of the accident scenes that he had come upon. This was a veteran OPP officer; he had been on the job for 25 years plus. It was amazing to me that he was able to give me dates and times of accidents. He probably could recall the names of those in the accidents, but of course he's not going to. He doesn't want to breach any privacy. But it's amazing the amount of detail that our first responders hold on to, that they retain after they've come to an accident scene.

I would be remiss as the former critic for community safety and correctional services if I didn't mention workers in our correctional institutions. I've spoken to many correctional officers during my time at the Legislature. I'm glad they are included in this legislation.

I'd like to share a story from a correctional officer I met with once—again, a veteran correctional officer; he had been in service for at least 20 years. He shared a story with me about a young fellow who was in custody. He had mental health issues. As is standard, due to government regulation, those with mental health issues who might be a harm to themselves are put into segregation. This young fellow, day after day after day, was asking to be taken out of segregation. He felt he was more of a danger to himself being in segregation than if he was put back into the general population and amongst other people. This corrections officer said he would do his best to get him out of there. He knew he really shouldn't be there.

Unfortunately, one day the corrections officer came in, and that young fellow had taken his own life. He was put on a gurney out in the hallway while they waited for someone to come and transport him outside the facility. That particular correctional officer had to walk past this deceased inmate several times throughout the day. As he was recounting this, he was actually tearing up and crying in my office. So imagine a very strong, large man, a tough man, being able to recall something like this and breaking down. It's heartbreaking to hear their stories.

I think every professional who will be included in this legislation can think of experiences similar to those I've outlined, which is why this legislation is so important. As we debate this bill, I do think it's important to consider the benefits this legislation would have if it was extended to include other emergency and first response personnel, like nurses, probation and parole officers, and so many more.

Speaker, I'm cognizant of my time.

I had one of my local firefighters reach out to me and share a statement. I'll be honest with you: When I received it this morning—I'm choking up now, actually. I got through the first line and I had to put it down. I'm going to try and get through it. I have tissues here in case I need them. This will probably take up my last six minutes, but I'm going to try and get through it. These are the words of Duane Janisse, who is the president of the Windsor Professional Firefighters Association:

"You're searching in the fire on your hands and knees and the heat is unbearable. Smoke's banked to the floor and you're desperately searching for the child they said was just inside the door. You answered the call.

"A young mother holding her lifeless, grey, cold infant shoves the baby into your arms with tears pouring down her cheeks."

I'm sorry, Speaker.

"She begs you to please save her baby girl. You know it's too late, but you do all that you can. You answered the call.

"You roll into the neighbourhood where the lawns are manicured and the cars shiny and new. You grab your gear and rush to the front door. As you step into the new home, on the floor in the hallway is the most beautiful, blond 16-year-old girl with the needle still in her arm. Her parents are crying, trying to comfort each other, and saying to you, 'We were only gone for an hour.' You answered the call.

"You arrive at a modest, single-storey home; the flames are shooting from every opening in the house. You stretch hose lines and ladder the structure. Despite your best efforts, the fire is the victor. You're exhausted and wet and covered in soot. While packing the rig, the homeowner sits on the curb, face in his hands, sobbing out loud, saying, 'That's all that I had and now it's gone.' You answered the call.

"You're standing at roll call at the beginning of shift. Your comrade is missing and not responding to calls and texts. The captain and crew head over to his place, as it's just around the corner. While checking the home and

peering in the windows, you witness what no one ever wants to see. Your brother is lying on his bed in a pool of blood with a gun in his hand. You empty his locker and question: How can this be? You answered the call.

“You’re 21 years old and fresh on the job. You’ve heard some of the stories but experienced none of them yet. You pry open the door to the apartment and the captain walks in. As you search the apartment, the captain calls out, ‘He’s over here.’ You enter the bedroom and the captain tells you to cut him down. As you cut the electrical cord from his neck the middle-aged man slumps to the ground. You answered the call.

“You head into the grocery store for grub for the crew. On the way in, an angry citizen calls you lazy and selfish and berates you. You nod and walk away; into the store you go. In the vegetable aisle the clerk rushes over and in a panicked voice says a woman needs help three aisles over. You rush to her side and begin CPR. You work on her hard, pushing on her chest, hoping to revive her. Forty minutes later she’s pronounced by EMS. The ride back to the station is quiet as can be as you think about her three kids coming home from school and finding they have a mother no longer. You answered the call.

“The tractor-trailer is fully engulfed in flames; the screams of the trapped driver cut through the dense fog, no doubt a factor in the rear-end collision. You jump into action and stretch a hand line and your driver rushes to get you water in time. The screams subside before the water can get there and you know it’s too late for the driver in there. You answered the call.

“You enter the funeral home with your uniform pressed and your shoes are all shined and you look your best. A long line of members parade past the casket: another fallen member to cancer. She’s much too young to leave this world, and you wonder to yourself as you pass by how many more of these will you need to attend. Your thoughts are interrupted as you look into the faces of her heartbroken family. You answered the call.

“You enter the house in a poor neighbourhood. They don’t have much and it’s apparent they can’t make ends meet. As your crew deals with the issue and you gather information, a three-year-old boy dressed only in his underwear grabs onto your leg and hugs ever so tightly. As you try to leave you can’t pry him away and he sobs bitterly to take him with you as you leave that day. You answered the call.

“When you arrive on the scene, the 10-year-old boy is frantic and, in between deep sobs, blurts out something about his grandfather in the backyard. The driver attempts to console the lad while the crew makes its way to the backyard to find grandpa with a shotgun still in his mouth. You answered the call.

“You knock on the door of the old grey-haired lady and she yells to come in. At the kitchen table she waits. It’s been three months since your last welfare visit. You ask her all the standard questions about her safety but she insists on talking about the family she once had. You sit and listen to the stories once again and you think how sad and lonely it must be. You answered the call.

“You’re out with the group. They’re as broken as you and drinking heavily, pretending nothing is wrong. Your family is waiting at home for you and when you show up you’re angry and mean to those who love you the most. You answered the call.

“It’s 3 a.m. You’re watching TV; nothing in particular, just trying to fill the void where sleep should be. On comes a commercial you don’t know what about and you begin to cry and think, ‘What’s wrong with me?’ You turn the set off and lay in the dark and close your eyes, hoping to fall asleep. Your mind won’t shut off. It’s like a big screen, flashing hundreds of slides of all that you’ve seen. You answered the call.

“For decades, these things have been haunting me and my friends. With nowhere to turn, for many it was the end. We finally had the courage to ask for help and we reached out to you to protect the protectors. We were happy and relieved when we heard the news someone cared and would help us out. Today on behalf of myself, my members and all first responders in this province, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the members of this Legislature who have supported us. You answered the call.”

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

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I want to begin my remarks today on Bill 163 by honouring the comments of the member from Windsor West—a very emotional, very heartfelt—just terrific. Congratulations, colleague, on a very emotional and very heartfelt speech.

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I may say, Speaker, I want to start by also congratulating the MPP for Oakville and Minister of Labour, and the MPP for Ottawa Centre and minister for community services, and also, while we’re honouring the contributions of colleagues in the House, the member for Parkdale–High Park, who, as the member for Windsor West noted, started this conversation in this House many years ago.

We stand on the shoulders of many speakers, but if I may, in the time I have left, I want to speak about the importance of this legislation from a singular and important perspective. As many members of this House will know, my late husband was a police officer. He started his career in Metro Toronto and then joined the OPP, where he spent 18 happy years saving lives across this province.

I know, as his former spouse, what it was like when he would come home from a call that he found very, very difficult. Fortunately, we were blessed with a very good relationship, Speaker, so in the context of our relationship we could have that conversation, sometimes over a coffee or a late dinner or a glass of wine, that people tend to have when they have seen something in their day that’s been very difficult. I felt blessed by that. But that was a conversation that we could have, and not every-body can have it.

One of the reasons I am pleased that this legislation has come forward is because it’s going to allow officers

on duty to have the kind of conversation that they need to have. That doesn't happen on the job right now—not nearly enough. Talking about mental illness could have been, in the past, until now, a career-limiting move. This legislation is not only important from all kinds of aspects—from a preventative aspect, for treatment, for presumptive issues—but also because it's going to allow us to change the conversation in workplaces, especially for our first responders. I'm proud that this government has taken that step forward.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my profound pleasure to rise in debate today and congratulate my colleague from Windsor. She had us all in tears, and I think it's moments like this, where there are moving tributes and testimony from members on issues like this, that bring us closer together. There is no question in my mind that there is undeniable support for this piece of legislation, not only in this assembly but throughout the province.

Of course, I would be remiss not to congratulate my good friend and colleague Cheri DiNovo, who pushed for this and continued to be an advocate and persevered over all of those times that she brought this forward.

Of course, you must give credit to the minister responsible, Mr. Flynn, and also to my leader, Patrick Brown, who I think, upon becoming not only the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party but an MPP, championed this bill. I think when we put partisan divides to the side, we can accomplish great things.

The fact that we have the opportunity to stand here today and talk about this also reminds me of how important it is to have this conversation, in the brief few seconds I have left. When I learned that this was going to be a very big issue, not just for our military—my husband served in the military and, though not in a combat role, went to Afghanistan twice with the Minister of Defence and was part of the operations. It was pretty tough. But one Christmas we were in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, staying at my mother's house. The Minister of Defence at the time was Peter MacKay, whom my husband worked for. They lost five soldiers that day.

We also lost an Ottawa police officer, Eric Czapnik. Some of the paramedics on the scene had post-traumatic stress disorder. That's when I realized that you don't have to be a world away in war to suffer from PTSD. You can be an Ottawa paramedic responding to a violent crime scene of a well-respected police officer. It's for that reason that I've always supported Cheri DiNovo's bill, and it's for that reason that today I'm proud to stand behind my colleague from Windsor West—I hope that's your riding name—to say what a great job you did with your speech.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a privilege for me to rise and respond to the comments from my colleague the member for Windsor West: the experiences she shared of what it's like to be a first responder, the kinds of things that people

have to deal with that are unimaginable to all of us in our daily lives and how they have to try to process those things that they have witnessed—those horrors and that trauma—and get up the next day and go to work. It's something that none of us can imagine having to deal with. So Bill 163 will create the presumption that first responders who experience PTSD acquired the PTSD in the course of their work.

Certainly, PTSD can impact your entire life. It can impact not just the individual who experiences the PTSD, but their families, their spouses and their children. We know that there are much higher rates of divorce and family stresses when there is PTSD in the family, and family members are often themselves on the front lines of what PTSD means. So this legislation is critically important to create that presumption, so that we don't re-traumatize first responders by forcing them to go through a lengthy process to prove that their PTSD was acquired in the course of their work responsibilities.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted, too, to have an opportunity to respond to the member from Windsor West and her comments. I share the view that it was very heartfelt and touched all people on all sides of the House, I'm sure—the comments you had and the emotion that you put into it.

I'd also like to thank and congratulate the member from Parkdale–High Park. She has brought this bill forward numerous times, and there's a whole series of parallels I'm seeing in the number of times a member of the opposition brought a bill forward and it didn't quite make its way through the process. It's not unlike my tipping bill, which another member brought forward on a number of occasions. Then we had a chance to actually make it a better bill, to fill it out more.

That's why I think it was very important that the member from Nepean–Carleton talked about and gave credit where it was due, to the Minister of Labour, in that the Minister of Labour went out and did extensive consultation to broaden the bill, to put a whole bunch of new effort into the bill and where it needed to go, by adding more individuals who could be defined under the definition, bringing fire investigators and First Nation firefighters into the definition, which goes well beyond the original Bill 2, but also adding correctional officers, youth services, First Nation emergency response teams and communications officers.

We took a lot of heat and criticism from members opposite that we didn't bring the bill forward fast enough, but I think that's one of the great strengths that our Minister of Labour has shown—and it's not just on this issue; it's on so many other issues. We see where he goes out and does extensive consultation, so that when he brings a bill forward, he brings it forward in the best possible way that we could have.

I'm particularly impressed by the whole piece in the legislation around prevention. There's no one in this House, I believe, who doesn't appreciate the opportu-

ities that we are going to provide: the training and the advance work with emergency response workers, in order that they will be aware of the potential impacts of exposure to traumatic events, and early intervention after those events, in order to ensure that they don't develop issues around post-traumatic stress disorder.

I do appreciate the comments made. I'm glad that we have universal, uniform support for this. I look forward to it moving forward as quickly as possible so that the piece of legislation that is needed is brought forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Windsor West for final comments.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the comments from all members of the House. I just want to make sure—I'm sure I mentioned this particular firefighter's name before I read his statement, but I want to make sure it's on the record. It was firefighter Duane Janisse, the president of the Windsor Professional Firefighters Association, who shared this with me. He also shared that he was up most of the night trying to think about what he would say, because there was so much going through his head. The fact of the matter is that it was 3 a.m. and he wasn't able to sleep, so he decided that he would put pen to paper. I think that this was incredibly moving, incredibly sad, but incredibly beautiful. It was very well written.

He sums it up nicely: that it's our job to protect the protectors. I think that the bill could be expanded a little more to include more of those protectors, but it's certainly a very big step forward in protecting those who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe, and those who relive this day in and day out. That was difficult for me to say, for me to share somebody else's

memories. I can just imagine what it would be like to actually own those memories, to relive them over and over again, like firefighter Janisse does, to not be able to sleep at night and only think about these horrific things that he has been exposed to.

I'd like to take the opportunity to touch on one thing that he said. That was when the firefighters stopped at the grocery store and some of the sentiment that people share with them about their thoughts on firefighters stopping at the grocery store and going in and some of the things that are said to them. I would just ask that the public remember that firefighters, police officers, EMS, correctional officers and all the first responders—they look tough on the outside but they're really soft on the inside. They do put their lives on the line for our safety and they do internalize a lot of the trauma that they see.

I would ask that everybody applaud and thank a first responder when you have access to them. I would like to start with our very own Sergeant-at-Arms, who used to be an RCMP officer and has been exposed to a few issues in his life, too. I'd like everyone to join me in applauding the first responders and thanking them for their service.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I would like to thank all members who have participated in the debate on Bill 163 with your heartfelt stories.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now 6 o'clock, and this Legislature stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Jagmeet Singh, Peter Tabuns
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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Mr. Jim Wilson 7513

London public transit

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong 7513

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Ms. Ann Hoggarth 7513

Stu Schwartz

Ms. Lisa MacLeod 7514

Automotive industry

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky 7514

Government and community services fair

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn 7514

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Ms. Laurie Scott 7514

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Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris 7515

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M. John Fraser 7515

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First reading agreed to 7516

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MOTIONS

Committee membership

Hon. James J. Bradley 7516

Motion agreed to 7516

Health care funding

Mr. Toby Barrett 7516

Dog ownership

Ms. Cheri DiNovo 7516

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Mr. Arthur Potts 7516

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Adoption disclosure

Ms. Daiene Vernile 7518

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