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Monday 21 March 2016

Lundi 21 mars 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 21 March 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 21 mars 2016

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. I'd like to recognize David Pickles, who is in the gallery here today. He's retiring after 32 years in the Ontario public service, and he actually wanted to spend his last day of work witnessing democracy in action here. Welcome, David.

By virtue of years of service, that means he met a very young Jim Bradley in his first day as Minister of the Environment in 1985 under the Peterson government. David also serves as a Pickering councillor and Durham regional councillor, and has been elected now for six terms.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to share with you today that a wonderful person from the riding of Huron–Bruce is page captain Khushali Shah, and joining us today in the House are her mother, Sejal Shah; her father, Devang Shah; and her sister Pankti Shah. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to welcome Lucas Dinardo and Kate Brubacher from DragonFly learning in Ottawa, who are here to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day. They will be spending time with my staff today, and with me, and learning about government. They're joined by their parents, Tina and Ermanno Dinardo, and Doug Brubacher, Pamela Power and brother Neil Brubacher. Welcome to you all.

I also want to not welcome, but welcome back our member Monte Kwinter. He's actually going to be 85 tomorrow; he won't be able to join us, but it's his birthday tomorrow—85 years old.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to welcome John Nunziata, former member of Parliament for York South–Weston, as well as Clare Forndran. They're here today on behalf of Dog Tales Rescue and Sanctuary. Welcome.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming Mr. Saadettin Ozcan, president of the Anatolian Heritage Foundation, and Mr. Mehmet Durmus, CEO of the Turkish Canadian Chamber of Commerce, to the House. They are having their annual event today in room 228. I invite all colleagues to drop in and say hello to our Turkish Canadian friends.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us today is the mother of page captain Lauren Creasy, Shelly Sharp, and Tim

Creasy. They're in the public gallery, joining us here today.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to introduce Sue Hotte, Kevin Gruhl, Fleurette Gruhl, Doug Hart, Henry Miron, Tess Sotirakos, Roscoe Reilley, Wendy Brown, William Barnes, Anthony Gallico, Larry Rosnik, Ron Walker and Natalie Mehra, who are here today to stop the closure of the Welland hospital.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I'm thrilled to welcome page Cooper Stone from Newcastle to Queen's Park here today. He's here on his first day as part of the page program. I know his mom and dad very well, and I'm sure they're very proud of him. My whole office wishes him the best of luck. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: They are just making their way in. They are from the Welland Ontario Health Coalition, Save Our Hospital. I can hear them coming; they will be there shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us today in the Speaker's gallery we have the interns from the Manitoba Legislative Internship Program. They're here for a few days to observe Ontario's process. Welcome to our interns from Manitoba.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Why is the Premier allowing Ornge Air to lease a helicopter from AgustaWestland, the very same company involved in the original Ornge Air scandal currently being investigated by the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, there have been massive changes made at Ornge. There was a whole investigation. The governance has changed. The individuals involved have changed. There's a new board.

I don't know the details of that specific decision, but what I do know is that Ornge is a different and revitalized organization. I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to speak to the specifics.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The name on the Premier's door may have changed, but what goes on behind it, sadly, remains the same.

On March 7, Ornge Air issued a notice of its intention to negotiate the lease of an AW139 helicopter from Finmeccanica, the parent company of AgustaWestland.

There was no public tender. Ornge says this is sole-sourced because this company is the only source that can deliver by June 30.

Why is the Premier allowing Ornge Air to crawl back into bed with their partners in this scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, let me just say—and I actually had the opportunity to meet a couple of Ornge pilots in a small northern airport recently. What’s really critical to me and to our government, and I would think to all members of this place, is that Ornge is able to provide the very, very best service to the people of Ontario when they need it. That is of the greatest concern.

As I say, the organization has been completely changed. There are new personnel, new governance. Those changes were made as a result of an investigation, obviously, into challenges and problems at that organization. Those changes have been made.

As I say, in terms of the specific decision, we can certainly look into that in greater depth, but what’s important to me is that people across this province get the service that they need from Ornge.

1040

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The Premier is allowing the fox back into the henhouse.

It was four years ago today that the auditor issued his report on Ornge Air’s shady dealings with Agusta-Westland. The auditor found that Ornge Air paid Agusta US\$148 million for 12 helicopters when they only needed nine helicopters. Agusta then kicked back US\$2.9 million into Ornge’s foundation, and then they kicked back another \$4.8 million for future marketing. All of these shady deals are currently being investigated by the OPP.

Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier allowing this deal to go on?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are very proud of the work that Ornge is doing in this province. In fact, they travel, through their helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, more than six million miles across the province, transporting more than 18,000 ill and often critically ill patients.

Ornge is well into a new chapter, with a culture that puts patients first. Surveys that have been done with patients in terms of measuring their satisfaction—they’re exemplary.

I’m so proud of our new CEO. I’ll be meeting him in the coming days. We have a new board of directors, as the Leader of the Opposition clearly knows, and a new senior management team. This is a new era for Ornge. I’m proud of the work that they do, and I’m proud of the work that the front-line health care workers working for Ornge do every day.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. The health minister may be proud, as he says, of a sole-

sourced deal being investigated by the OPP, but let’s get into the facts. There’s only one word to describe Ornge Air’s new deal with Agusta, and that’s “shady.” In February of last year, Ornge Air said it was looking to sell the helicopters they bought from Agusta. At that time, Ornge CEO Andrew McCallum said they were too expensive to maintain. He also said that few other agencies would even think of using these helicopters as an air ambulance. So can this Premier explain why on earth Ornge would now be looking at purchasing or leasing these helicopters?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that there were huge challenges at this organization, which is why there have been huge changes and which is why the governance has changed and the individuals have changed. The fact is, as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has said, it really is a new culture at Ornge, including new structures and new people involved.

I think it should be of prime concern to all of us that those 18,000 patients get the service they require, that they get to the hospitals they need, that they get to the health care professionals they need, and that that is done in the most expeditious way possible. That’s what’s happening—six million kilometres a year, 18,000 patients. It’s extremely important that we recognize it’s an important job these front-line health care workers do, and we support them in that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: Nothing about this deal makes sense. Last December, just four months ago, Ornge cancelled its plan to sell the Agusta helicopters. At that time, Dr. McCallum questioned the original decision to buy the helicopters. Why, then, is Ornge looking to lease the very same helicopter that the CEO said was too expensive to maintain and not suited for the job?

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Who is going to benefit from this deal? It’s not the Ontario taxpayers. I need an explanation for this.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to comment in the final supplementary, but the only answer to “Who is going to benefit from a decision that is made at Ornge?” is the patients. That is who will benefit. That’s why we made the changes that we made. All of the changes that we made were in aid of making sure that patients were at the centre of those decisions. That’s who will benefit: those 18,000 patients a year who need the service of Ornge, who need those highly trained professionals to be at their best. That’s who will benefit from decisions that are made at Ornge.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The Auditor General didn't say the Ornge scandal was benefiting patients. He said taxpayers and the people of Ontario were being ripped off. The reality is, the auditor said millions of dollars were wasted because the government let the Ornge executives run wild. Well, the same thing is happening today.

The Premier said she would be different. When she was health minister, the Deputy Premier said that she would keep a close eye on Ornge. But what we have is the Ornge scandal 2.0.

If the Premier knew about this deal, shame on her. If the Premier didn't know about this deal, shame on her again. Is it any wonder that the people of Ontario don't trust this government?

Will the Premier pick up the phone and cancel this shady lease, yes or no? Don't pass the buck. Yes or no: Will you cancel the shady lease?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a very serious matter. It was a very serious matter that there needed to be changes made at Ornge, and those changes were made. There is new governance at Ornge. There is a new culture. There is a culture that focuses on the best interests of patients.

The allegations that the Leader of the Opposition is making, I have no idea what they are based in. I do not know the nature of this particular decision. But what I do know is that the governance at Ornge has changed; the personnel have changed. We have highly trained professionals who, every single day, are working in the best interests of those 18,000 patients. We support those people; we support the work that they do. We made the changes at Ornge so that they would be able to do that work unfettered.

If there is more information that is required on this particular decision, we will get that for the Leader of the Opposition, but I would think that he would be most concerned about those patients who need the support—

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

TUITION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Liberal government is paying for an advertising campaign promoting free tuition, but the Premier said herself that it's not really free, and she was uncomfortable calling it free. Can the Premier explain, then, why her government is advertising something to Ontarians that she says isn't true?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the fact is, 150,000 students in this province will receive grants that will be the same as or exceed their tuition each year.

That's free tuition. What I said to the students—because I was involved in a chat online—is, yes, it needs some explanation, as student assistance has always needed some explanation, because families earn different amounts of money, kids have different circumstances. So all of that has—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Of course, all of that has to be taken into account, Mr. Speaker. But the bottom line is, 150,000 students in this province will have free tuition who wouldn't have had it before.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I'm astounded that this Premier is still using the word "free." The fact is, the Premier herself just said that she's not comfortable using the term "free" because there are costs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I guess I have to give some evidence that I'm not happy with people interjecting.

Finish, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yet we see the Premier standing in front of young people with a huge sign that says "Free tuition" and we hear the President of the Treasury Board and Liberal cabinet ministers telling low-income families that they'll get free tuition, when the Premier has said publicly herself that that is not true.

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It's about integrity, plain and simple. Will this Premier directly communicate to her cabinet and staff her lack of comfort at misleading Ontarians and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader will withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: How on earth can the NDP oppose a proposal that is going to allow 150,000 students to have free tuition? How can they oppose that?

The Canadian Federation of Students' Gabrielle Ross-Marquette said students "have a lot to celebrate today with this commitment to fairness, equity and justice for students," particularly those from low-income families.

This is a policy that changes the face of student assistance in this province. It allows more students from low- and middle-income families to go to post-secondary, whether to college or university, without having to pay tuition, without having to accumulate debt. I would have thought—

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

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what we oppose is a two-faced Premier. The Premier's—

Interjections.

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

The member will withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me.

That's the second time in your round that I've had to ask you to withdraw. Relax. Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier says her budget doesn't really promise free tuition. But her office, presumably on her behalf, issued a statement saying that they're using those words "deliberately ... because we need to fundamentally change the behaviour of kids and parents from low-income backgrounds."

Not only is her office saying they're deliberately using a language that is not accurate, but it's completely patronizing and insulting to hard-working, struggling Ontarians.

Will this Premier apologize for these arrogant and condescending comments made on her behalf and tell her staff that all Ontarians, including low-income families, are smart enough to understand—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I think it's astounding that the NDP would take a position against free tuition for 150,000 students.

The fact is, the point of this policy is to make it clear to people, to students and their families in lower- and middle-income families, that they will have access to post-secondary education that they didn't have access to before.

The reality is that young people from higher-income families are accessing post-secondary at higher rates than low- and middle-income families, and that's not acceptable to us, nor should it be acceptable to the NDP, nor should it be acceptable to the PCs.

It shouldn't be acceptable to anyone in this province that a student would feel that they can't go to post-secondary because of finances. We're changing that. Students will have access; 150,000 students will have free tuition. That's something to be celebrated, not opposed.

Interjections.

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

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The Premier is advertising free tuition, even though she says it doesn't exist. She promised drivers she would reduce auto insurance rates by 15%, but then she said she had no intention of keeping that promise because it was a stretch goal. She promised a five-day wait time for home care. People are waiting 200 days, and she shrugs it off.

No wonder people are disappointed in this Premier and cynical about this Liberal government. People are much smarter than the Premier gives them credit for.

Will this Premier please stop with the communication hype, rein in her arrogance and start treating Ontarians with the respect that they deserve?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I think one of the things that feeds cynicism is an NDP that is supposed to stand up for people who are marginalized, that is supposed to understand that young people who don't have access to post-secondary education need the support of government, and that should understand that the 150,000 students in this province who will have free tuition need the support of government. That, I think, is something that the NDP needs to address.

The College Student Alliance says that it is "thrilled to see the 2016 budget reflect current realities. By implementing the OSG, the government has committed to a more accessible sector for all students seeking a college education..."

The leader of the third party might want to talk to the students who are actually going to benefit from this change, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people hear promises from the Liberals; they read the splashy headlines. But when you take a look, it's obvious that the government is more interested in getting a headline than keeping the promises that they make to the people who are counting on them. The Premier knows it. She said as much last week on Periscope.

Why should Ontarians trust this government when it's announcing programs that don't exist, and making promises the Premier knows won't be kept?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear with this House and with the people of Ontario. What I said last week was that there needed to be some explanation when students apply for student assistance. That is always the way it has been, and it will continue to be.

The fact is that the changes we have made, which will change the landscape of student assistance in this province, mean that of the 600,000 total in this province who are in post-secondary, 150,000 of those students will have free tuition, or better than free tuition, depending on their circumstances.

That is free tuition. It changes the way student assistance works in this province. I'm going to stand with the student organizations who have been asking for this change. We've made the change and it will benefit students across the province.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, clarity is exactly what New Democrats think the people of this province deserve. You either keep your promises or you don't. Students either get free tuition or they don't. Seniors either get home care in five days or they don't. Auto

insurance rates either come down or they don't. It's no wonder that people are frustrated when this government seems more interested in hyping itself than providing the services and supports that people deserve.

When will this Premier start showing a little more integrity—or shall I call it “clarity”?

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

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, this Premier broke the barrier for our students to continue their education in the post-secondary system.

When it comes to student aid, we are not here to learn a lesson from that party. That is the party that, when they were in office, wanted to eliminate tuition fees for our students, and they ended up doubling them. We are not going to listen to anything from them.

Mr. Speaker, 150,000 students are going to receive free education from our post-secondary universities and colleges: 95% of full-time OSAP-eligible students will receive non-repayable Ontario student grants; 90% of dependent college students, whose parents make less than \$50,000, will receive OSAP grants that are greater than the average college tuition; and 70% of dependent university students—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, the people of Ontario are learning more about what they're paying for: a culture of luxury and excess this government has allowed over at Metrolinx. Not only have we paid millions for nine months of near-empty UP ghost express trains, we now learn they wasted thousands more to show off upscale uniforms during Toronto Fashion Week. These guys just don't know when to stop, and the Premier seems unwilling to rein them in.

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After learning that Metrolinx spent more than \$8,000 to cancel the ill-advised fashion fiasco on top of the \$40,000 original design cost, will the Premier do her job and ensure that our transit dollars are not wasted any further on valueless vanity projects?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member for his question. I understand this issue is of importance to him and also, of course, to me.

I've had the opportunity to convey my concerns to the chair of the Metrolinx board. I have conveyed to him that it's important for all of us to make sure that we continue to focus on our core mandate of planning, building, operating and supporting more transit here in the GTHA and beyond, including communities like Kitchener-Waterloo. In fact, that is the work that the team at Metrolinx is focused on.

I've also informed the chair of the board that Metrolinx folks will be required to work more closely with the Ministry of Transportation to ensure that, going forward, we continue to be completely in alignment with respect to making sure we deliver on that mandate. I'd be happy to deliver more information in the follow-up questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: The minister's stated disappointment last week does nothing to restore the taxpayers' money that they continue to waste. What a fashion faux pas. I mean, I'm sure we're all disappointed that the minister didn't get his chance to do Zoolander's blue steel on the runway in retro-chic train couture, but the fact is that Metrolinx is charged with transit planning. This needs to be project transit, not Project Runway. This Premier is charged with overseeing billions in future transit planning through Metrolinx, and yet we continue to see her allow our precious transit dollars to be wasted again and again.

Will the Premier tell us how she expects anyone to trust her to oversee billions in transit investments when we see that money being thrown down the runway?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I said in my first answer to the member opposite, I've already had that conversation with the chair of the board to make sure that we are completely focused on the mandate that I've been given and that Metrolinx has.

I will say that for close to two years now, I've had the privilege of working closely with board chair Rob Prichard, with president and CEO Bruce McCuaig and with all of the board members and senior executive members at Metrolinx. Here's what I've learned: They are an extraordinarily committed group of people who understand their mandate and who are delivering on that mandate. In fact, over the last couple of years, what we've seen—since 2003—is that Metrolinx and GO Transit have, for example, among many other things, built 14 new GO stations, rebuilt four existing GO stations, extended our crucial rail network by nearly 90 kilometres, added 31,000 parking spots, added over 200 new railcars, over 150 new single-level buses and will add more buses in the years to come. We will also—

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

New question.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Cindy Forster: The Welland hospital site of the Niagara Health System serves tens of thousands of families in my riding of Welland, some of whom are with us in the gallery here today. The Liberal government has decided to go ahead with plans to close yet another hospital in south Niagara, based on a limited and short-sighted report issued in 2012.

This was a decision that the Liberal government made without any consultation with families in my community. This so-called restructuring of the Niagara Health System will be one of the largest in Ontario's history, forcing the closure of five hospitals in my community and forcing

the most vulnerable to travel almost an hour—in some cases, more than an hour—to access emergency care.

Will the minister explain to this House and to my friends who have joined me today why the Liberal government refuses to reverse this ill-informed and short-sighted decision?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: This decision, of course, and the plans that the Niagara Health System is following—they accepted the recommendations of Dr. Kevin Smith, who spent a great deal of time consulting not only with health care professionals, but with literally thousands of members of the Niagara community to come up with a set of recommendations as well as to ensure that the sustainability of the health care system is there for Niagara, and that it's also the highest quality of services that the people deserve.

The Niagara Health System, with a planning grant that we've provided of \$26.2 million already, is proceeding. The board has accepted those recommendations. They have struck a large committee, which has significant community representation, not only representation from municipal leadership and municipal councils, including Welland, Wainfleet, Port Colborne—all of those areas that deserve to have those quality health services. They're working through a plan, which they will at one point be submitting to us. We'll consider it. We'll consider it with the local LHIN. We'll make a decision on the basis of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: We know that Niagara has one of the highest populations of seniors in the province. The government's decision to close another hospital would mean that a family facing an emergency in my community would have to drive as long as over an hour to reach an emergency department, and even longer if you have to rely on public transportation.

Worse, occupancy rates currently across the Niagara Health System are at an alarming rate, and the closing of the Welland hospital will have devastating impacts on capacity levels for the remaining hospitals, putting my community's health at risk.

Will the minister put an immediate stop to the short-sighted decision to close the Welland hospital?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, what I won't put a stop to is the community-led process that is guided by the best experts in that region and across the province to determine how to provide the best health services for the people of the Niagara region.

In fact, I know that NHS did reveal what their plans are for the Welland location. I know the reaction from the local community. There was a lot of positive reaction to the proposals, including on issues like long-term care, increasing the number of beds and two new buildings, which will provide significant numbers of services.

But, really—and I know the member from Welland knows this, because she was part of a meeting that I had several weeks ago with the mayors from the regions to discuss specifically this issue—this is a long process that is being undertaken in an appropriate fashion through the

leadership of the NHS but in close co-operation and consultation with everybody concerned.

FARM SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. My riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries is partly rural and home to many family farms, including my neighbours'.

I know the farmers in my riding are very concerned about safe farming practices and workplace safety, so I was pleased to hear that the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association was once again celebrating Canadian agricultural safety week.

Although it's always good to see events that illustrate the importance of farm safety, we also need to be sure that our farmers are aware of potential safety risks and what they can do to mitigate them.

In Ontario, we have close to 50,000 farms and 86,000 primary agricultural workers. We need to ensure that we are setting up our farmers to be safe. This is especially significant when we think of children, who may be helping out with work on the family farm.

Speaker, can the minister please tell this House how Canadian agricultural safety week benefits our farmers?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Cambridge this morning for her question. I know she spends a lot of time in the North Dumfries part of her riding, which is a great agricultural base for the riding of Cambridge.

Last week was Canadian agriculture safety week, an annual public education campaign which aims to reduce the risk of accidents and hazards on our farms throughout Ontario. Our ministry is proud to work with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, recognizing the importance of on-farm safety programming. Additionally, we're pleased to support Workplace Safety and Prevention Services of Ontario in their delivery of farm safety education programs across the province.

This year's theme is how to be an ag-safe family and more specifically, on keeping kids safe, and focused on encouraging children and young adults to remember and stay safe while helping out with the chores and responsibilities on a farm each and every day.

As the member mentioned, it's always a tragic event when someone gets injured while working on a farm, and it's only made worse when that individual is indeed a child.

By focusing on young farmers, we're encouraging them to develop safe farming practices. Mr. Speaker, one of the great supporters of agriculture in Ontario, the member from St. Catharines, had a meeting last week with regard to farm safety in the Niagara Peninsula.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the minister. As we all know, agricultural work is often hazardous and can lead to serious workplace injuries. People in my

riding of Cambridge and throughout the Waterloo region work in the agricultural sector and face these inherent risks each and every day.

Tragically, when my son was 14 years old, he lost a friend to a farming accident. The teenager had climbed his family's silo to check on the level of corn in the silo, when he was overcome by fumes and fell in.

Our government understands that the risks involved in the agricultural sector are very real. I understand that in 2006, our government extended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include farming operations for the first time ever.

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Speaker, through you to the minister, can you tell my constituents what else our government is doing to protect the health and safety of Ontarians and families who work in our agricultural sector?

Hon. Jeff Leal: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd really like to thank the member for that excellent question because we all value the hard work that farmers do every single day.

At the Ministry of Labour, we know that prevention is the key and that awareness training really helps prevent those workplace accidents. This holds true for farms, as well. It's not just industry; it's farms, as well.

Knowing the risks involved in the work and knowing the rights and the responsibilities you have as a worker in Ontario makes all the difference for people who actually work on those farms. I think it's always important that we should remind people to train properly, to be aware of the dangers, and that will help keep everybody safe on the farms.

We conduct, at the Ministry of Labour, both proactive and reactive visits to ensure that we have the best practices in place, and we will charge those people who aren't living up to their responsibilities.

We all need to be in this together to make sure that Ontario's farm operations are as safe and as productive as they can be.

TUITION

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Premier. The Premier says she's worried about the free tuition plan. In fact, the Premier now claims that "it's free with some explanation required." Allison Jones from the Canadian Press had a headline that read "Wynne Says She Worried About Pitching Tuition as Free..."

However, the Premier didn't have a problem calling it free tuition on March 1. In fact, the Premier actually responded to four questions that day by shouting to the mountains about free tuition. It's only when students looked at the fine print that the Premier added her asterisk. The Premier knows that the government's original claims of free tuition are simply wrong.

Mr. Speaker, this government can't even get free tuition right. Can they get anything right?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, 150,000 students in this province will have free tuition. That is the

case. Young people who live in families of modest means will have access to post-secondary education in a way they have not had before.

Now, I actually understand, coming from the PCs, that this might not be a policy that they would support, but from the NDP—I was very surprised that they wouldn't support young people having more access to post-secondary and the government playing a role in that.

I just want to quote from Spencer Nestico-Semianiw from OUSA, who said, "These are sweeping improvements that will dramatically improve financial aid for our students. Students will receive more grants, and for many of them, tuition will be free."

The fact is the Ontario university student association has been advocating for these changes. The student groups have been asking us to make these changes. We have, and those 150,000 students will have free tuition.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: When is free not free? When this Liberal government gets their hands on a plan, we see it time and time again. Just look at the spin: "some explanation required," "there are caveats," the program will "evolve." Those are more aspirational stretch goals. That's all we ever get from this government.

Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse, the Liberals are taking away \$165 million worth of tax credits from students.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier come clean? Will the Premier admit this isn't about helping students; this is about distracting from the government's scandal, waste and mismanagement?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

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

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for that question. I also want to remind the member that his party voted against the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant in the past, and his party actually wanted to abolish OSAP. They wanted to give student aid based on merit, not on the needs of the students.

Mr. Speaker, 250,000 students—80% of OSAP-eligible students—will have less debt than they would have under the current OSAP. Mr. Speaker, 95% of OSAP-eligible students will receive non-repayable Ontario student grants, and 150,000 students are going to receive grants from the government which will be equal to or even maybe more than their tuition fees.

As I said earlier, this Premier broke the barrier for low-income students to continue their education in our colleges and universities.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings: second time.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question this morning is for the Minister of Health. Good morning, Minister.

Seniors in Windsor and Tecumseh are worried about the Liberal plan to nearly double the cost of their prescription drugs. Under the Liberal budget, the cost of the deductible for the vast majority of seniors will increase by 70% this summer. Seniors living on fixed incomes simply can't afford this. People are already struggling to pay the rent and to put food on the table.

My question to the minister is simple and straightforward: Exactly how many of Ontario's two million seniors will be forced to pay more for their prescription drugs because of this Liberal government?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know some erroneous information has been out there which doesn't accurately reflect the number of seniors who will benefit from this program. The truth is that roughly 25% of Ontario's two million seniors will benefit from paying no annual deductible at all. There's a significant number—173,000—who are currently paying a \$100 annual deductible, who will join roughly 300,000—

Mr. Paul Miller: How about the 75%?

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

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —who will join more than a quarter of a million of the lowest-income seniors who will pay no annual deductible, roughly 25% of the total seniors in this province. It's pretty remarkable that that number will translate into that positive space.

There are also other important changes that we've made, which reflect that we are the most generous province by far in the entire country with regard to—

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Well, obviously by the mathematical gobbledegook you're refusing to tell us how many seniors are going to be paying more for their prescription drugs.

Our seniors aren't rich. They watch every penny, and the Premier wants to nearly double the cost of their prescriptions. This is the wrong thing to do. We should be expanding access to universal prescription drugs, not forcing seniors to pay more.

When will the minister stop making excuses, actually stand up for the seniors in this province and put a stop to the Premier's plan?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I implore—in fact, I'm begging the NDP to just one time in this Legislature mention that 170,000 more seniors, the lowest-income seniors, those who that party would purport to support—I don't understand why it's impossible for them to actually reference that positive development.

The out-of-pocket expense for seniors in this province is \$277 per year. The next closest province in Canada is more than twice that. In fact, in some provinces the out-of-pocket expenditures are as high as \$1,000 a year.

This is a very progressive policy. It means that those that can afford it will be asked to pay a little bit more. But a quarter of the seniors, those low-income seniors who I would have hoped the NDP would support in this process—but that was the old NDP; they can't mention that number.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMS

Mr. Granville Anderson: My question is to the minister responsible for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

In 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations first proclaimed March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day commemorates the Sharpeville Massacre, a day where police opened fire and killed 69 peaceful protestors who were demonstrating against South Africa's apartheid "pass law." While this was overt racism, we know that in Ontario there still exist a number of individual, cultural and systemic barriers that prevent racial minorities from realizing full equality.

Could the minister inform the members of this House about what Ontario has done to address racism?

1120

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the MPP for Durham for the question.

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day that annually—

Applause.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Yes, it's an important day.

This day reminds us to fight racism and related forms of intolerance and discrimination worldwide.

Ontario has long been a champion of equality and an international beacon for cultural pluralism. Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to prohibit discrimination based on race when it passed the Ontario Human Rights Code. Ontario was the birthplace of the Human Rights Commission in Canada. By 1977, other jurisdictions, including the federal government, would follow Ontario's leadership and create their own commissions.

Recently, I joined the Premier to demonstrate Ontario's continued leadership on this file through our Anti-Racism Directorate. I look forward to keeping the members of this House up to date on an ongoing basis on this incredible initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Minister. When the Premier announced the Anti-Racism Directorate, she highlighted dynamics that have refocused modern issues: movements like Black Lives Matter, the ongoing history of police street checks and the debates around the Syrian refugee crisis. It is clear that we need to take greater and more coordinated action against racism.

It has only been one month since the directorate was announced and I understand that there is still a lot more work to be done. But could the minister inform the

members of this House on how our government is laying the foundation for the new Anti-Racism Directorate?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, I want to thank the member for Durham.

Ontario's new Anti-Racism Directorate was formed to remove social and economic barriers that prevent our province from achieving true equality and to apply a wide anti-racism lens to government policy.

Over the past month, I've had the opportunity to work with a lot of people at the ministry. We've hired a new associate deputy minister to take the lead with the directorate. I've also had a few meetings with important stakeholders, community-based organizations and the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I've met with partners, like the Colour of Poverty and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians.

The Anti-Racism Directorate is determining how we can help fight racism to ensure that everyone here in Ontario has equal opportunity to succeed. In the coming months, I'm committed to continuing engaging and collaborating with stakeholders and partners to achieve true equality here in the province of Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

This government has failed Shania Paige. Ms. Paige is a young woman suffering from a mental illness. As Christina Blizzard of the Toronto Sun noted, this "isn't just a human tragedy of immense proportion." She wrote, "It's an infuriating, terrifying and pathetic indictment of the hypocrisy we spout about mental illness in this"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry. The member will withdraw. You cannot quote something from the outside that you can't say here. So please withdraw.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I withdraw.

This was a case of someone who was in desperate need of mental health services and couldn't get the help she needed. Is the minister embarrassed he tells people to seek help while the very help they need isn't there because this government has cut it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite is correct that this is a very, very serious issue. It's one that I personally take very seriously. It's also a complex issue. But there's no question that we need to ensure that, when an individual is facing a mental health crisis, they're provided, at that moment in time, with the right supports that they need in order that the correct pathway is followed.

We don't want to see those individuals moving where there could potentially be a violent episode against themselves or other persons or whether it could head down that path of the criminal justice system, because that's the wrong path for these individuals. We need to make sure, and we need to invest money that will go to provide those supports at that moment of time so that the person gets the right supports, they get connected with the emergency services that they require, the community resources that

they require and the primary care resources that they need to be stabilized and get better.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: Minister, you're a lot of talk with zero action. It has been over a decade and you keep saying the same things over and over and more people are dying or ending up in our corrections services with zero support. You would have thought that this government would have learned something from the death of Ashley Smith in 2007. Her death in solitary confinement in a Kitchener institution was tragic, but just when you thought things couldn't get any worse, this government continues to cut much-needed mental health services.

This government loves to talk and tweet about Bell Let's Talk Day but failed to actually offer any real help to those in need.

Mr. Speaker, what will it take? How many more people will have to die before this government takes the funding of mental health services seriously?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I can't believe that the member opposite would take an individual's crisis and use it for such political partisan reasons.

We're investing over \$3 billion in our health care system specifically for mental health and addictions. That continues to go up each and every year: 137 million new dollars over the next three years as we engage in a new phase of mental health supports—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member who asked the question, come to order, please, and the member behind you, the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There was \$810 million last year alone for our community mental health supports across this province.

I know there's more work to be done, of course. We'll never reach that point of providing those supports that individuals need unless we work together; implement the best advice that we're getting from, for example, the leadership advisory council that we have which is advising me; making those important investments; and making sure that individuals who are facing these crises and these challenges get the support they need.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier.

Last week, I travelled to northwestern Ontario along with the member for Kenora-Rainy River and met with Grand Chief Fiddler, Deputy Grand Chief Fox and other leaders from the NAN communities.

We heard from Chief Cutfeet about how few in his community have regular access to doctors, nurses or specialists for diseases such as diabetes, which is rampant throughout the NAN territories.

Sioux Lookout has the highest rate of rheumatic fever in the world—a treatable, preventable yet deadly illness if not acted upon. In fact, two four-year-old children have died from this preventable illness in the last two years.

This is 2016, Speaker. The Premier has been the critic for aboriginal affairs. She knows these problems exist. Why is she doing nothing to change such an intolerable situation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: We in this government take this issue very seriously. I have been in contact with Chief Fiddler on a number of occasions. When this most recent situation developed, I was in contact with him. We are working on ways to deal with this issue. This situation is not going to continue. We are making every effort at the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, working in collaboration with other ministries—the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Environment and, indeed, other ministries across the government. We are taking a whole-government approach to this.

Last week, I was in northwestern Ontario and I had several discussions about this issue, as it involved climate change and as it involved safe drinking water. It's all a part of the whole. We have to tackle these issues as an entity. We are doing that as a government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would say that not much is going on when it comes to what this government claims their relationship is with First Nations communities.

Three weeks ago, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation declared a health care state of emergency in this province. They're reeling from endemic suicides; living in poor, crowded housing conditions; and their communities have undrinkable water. They have for decades, Speaker. None of these problems are new. They have existed for decades.

Will this Premier act today to address the dire health crisis in Sioux Lookout, in the region and across the NAN territories, and stop the suicides that are occurring there?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. David Zimmer: The Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are taking this very seriously and, frankly, I agree with Chief Fiddler when he declared the state of emergency for the population represented by NAN. I have talked with Chief Fiddler and I have talked with Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day. In fact, next week, I'm going to be sitting down with those chiefs and others, and federal health minister Jane Philpott, to specifically and emphatically discuss this state of emergency and what we need to do, collectively, at all levels of government to be able to address this.

1130

The party opposite knows this is not something that can be solved overnight. The prudent thing is to have

these conversations, to actually work with First Nations rather than without, which seems to be what they would suggest doing; to actually work on a collaborative action plan that will, in a significant, tangible, realistic way, begin to address these issues.

I'm looking forward as well to the federal Liberal budget tomorrow. I've got confidence that it's going to speak to some of these issues with regard to First Nations.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question today is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Last Thursday, the minister was in Thunder Bay to announce that the Ontario government would be making a significant investment through the Green Investment Fund to provide First Nation communities with the training, tools and infrastructure they need to address climate change.

Climate change is a matter of concern for all Ontarians, which is why our government has taken small and large steps over many years to help reduce Ontario's impact. Climate change will also dramatically affect indigenous communities, jeopardizing the First Nations and Métis ways of life, health, territories and resources. Can the minister tell us more about these investments?

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, it was a pleasure to be joined last week by my colleagues the members for Thunder Bay–Superior North and Thunder Bay–Atikokan at the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corp. last week to announce this important new initiative.

First Nation communities, Laurentian University's Ontario Centre for Climate Impacts and Adaptation Resources—we will be working with First Nations and the university to develop adaptation plans to help First Nation communities prepare for the effects of climate change; to build the technical capacity in order for First Nation communities to take advantage of cap-and-trade; and to develop a northern Ontario climate change impact study using the data from these adaptation plans.

Speaker, ensuring First Nations have the tools they need to fight and adapt to climate change is important. First Nations and our universities will work together. They will combine their unique skills and special knowledge. This is the best way to do it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's great to hear that our government recognizes the importance of engaging indigenous communities on climate change. It's clear that our government is committed to working with indigenous people in Ontario to address the impacts of climate change felt by their communities.

I understand that our government is also taking steps to help remote First Nations communities reduce their dependency on diesel fuel. This will help them develop the capacity to become more self-sufficient through the use of renewable energy and open up economic opportunities.

Can the minister please tell us more about how this government is supporting indigenous communities towards this goal?

Hon. David Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I also announced last week that Ontario will invest \$8 million to develop advanced micro-grid solutions to remote First Nation communities.

Continuous diesel-fired electricity generation in our remote First Nation communities emits an estimated 65 metric kilotonnes of greenhouse gases annually. This is equivalent to about 15,000 cars on the road. This is not healthy for those northern communities. It is not healthy for our province.

A shift to micro-grids from diesel fuel is vital in our fight against climate change. It is imperative that we begin preparing First Nation communities to adapt to climate change now. I look forward to working with our partner First Nations to see that real progress is made on this issue.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of Health.

Earlier this year, the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance was told they would be getting \$2.5 million less than they were expecting from the province's Minister of Health. We have seen cuts to nursing positions and physician services across the province, and now my constituents are worried the services they depend on may be next on the chopping block.

Does the minister have any plans to cut more services at the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg over the next fiscal year?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: From that question, the sense I'm getting from that member opposite is that there might be an inkling that he would support our budget this year, because we have a 1% increase in the base for every single hospital across the province—in fact, we're even providing additional funds for hospitals that are designated rural or small—plus \$350 million which is going to our hospitals across the province, which actually works out to about a 2.1% increase in the budget, in the line—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On average.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —on average, for our hospitals across the province.

These are important investments. I'm happy to talk to him about the specific concern that he has. But the truth is, Mr. Speaker, we're increasing our hospital funding, and it will make a significant difference, right across the board, to the level of services that people deserve in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Minister of Health: Over the last week, people in Wallaceburg, Walpole Island First Nation and throughout Chatham-Kent told me that they are very worried about the future of the emergency department at the Sydenham District

Hospital. The facts are that 13 years of Liberal scandals, waste and mismanagement are responsible for taking away funding for essential services like health care.

The people of Wallaceburg, Walpole Island and Chatham-Kent depend on Sydenham hospital's emergency department. My question this morning is very simple: Is the emergency department at the Sydenham hospital going to remain open as a fully functioning, 24-hour emergency department?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There's nothing that I'm aware of that would change the level and quality of health care provided to the patients in Chatham-Kent—to the hospital reference.

But I do want to mention—because you've mentioned Chatham-Kent as well, if we can talk about that area for a minute—that there was a very important development that took place just in the past few days with regard to the hospital in Leamington.

I think this Legislature knows that we provided over \$1 million to try to attract obstetricians and gynecologists to that hospital, to keep the birthing centre, to keep that obstetrics ward open. Well, the first obstetrician confirmed that he is coming to Leamington. I'm very proud to announce that the obstetrics unit, that birthing centre, will remain open and it has a new obstetrician.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last week, we learned that Metrolinx spent tens of thousands of public dollars to design special fashionable uniforms for the Union Pearson Express, and spent thousands more to get the uniforms featured during fashion week in Toronto, only to later drop out of the event.

We know Metrolinx does nothing without the approval of the Minister of Transportation. It was the current Premier who committed to the UP Express's flawed business model six years ago, when she was transportation minister. But instead of taking responsibility for UP Express, the minister has scapegoated public servants who were only doing what they were told to do.

Will the minister stop pretending that Metrolinx is independent of his ministry and finally accept responsibility for the UP Express blunders?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member from Parkdale-High Park for her question.

As I said earlier today, I have had the chance to speak with or communicate with the chair of the Metrolinx board. There's a very clear understanding that the Ministry of Transportation and Metrolinx will continue to work closely together as we fulfill the mandate that the people of Ontario have given this government for Metrolinx and the ministry to design, build, operate, support and sustain additional transit.

Earlier today, I had the chance, at length, to mention a number of the initiatives that we've moved forward with, that we've had tremendous success with, that we've made more progress on. There is, as we all know, a

significant requirement to make sure that we continue to invest in transit here in the 416 and the 905 and beyond, across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. I have no doubt that the team at Metrolinx, with whom I've worked closely now for close to two years, will continue to work with us to fulfil that mandate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Back to the minister: Whenever Metrolinx has appeared in the newspaper recently, it hasn't been exactly good news: Union Pearson Express trains with expensive uniforms but few passengers; a mile-long bridge carving through the Davenport community without public agreement; and a gas plant suddenly appearing in plans for the Eglinton Crosstown, again without public consultation.

How can the public trust Metrolinx to serve the public interest, and spend billions in public dollars, when the ministry is making the real decisions behind closed doors, without any public support?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I have to say I categorically reject the premise of that member's question on the follow-up.

Just a few days ago, the Premier of Ontario, thanks in large part to her leadership, stood alongside the team at Metrolinx and other members from this caucus at the Keele station for the Eglinton Crosstown. Let's remember that the Eglinton Crosstown, at \$5.3 billion, is the single-largest public transit project in Ontario history, and it's taking place because this Premier and this government have made the commitment and made the hard decisions to build transit. We're building that transit, working closely, of course, with Metrolinx.

What would be most helpful in this Legislature, occasionally, is if members of the NDP would support the budgets that we put forward, which will help us fund the transit that they allege they think we need in this region.

RECEPTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Etobicoke North on a point of order.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I respectfully invite all members of the Legislature to a reception held by the Turkish Canadian community, the Anatolian Heritage Federation, taking place immediately after question period in rooms 228 and 230.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am going to take a moment just to offer some advice and a request. The advice is that I believe that every member in this House knows, or should know, the type of language that is not parliamentary. I would also include staff who may help you with questions—putting that into the questions, they should know, or do know, that it's unparliamentary. I've heard too many things over the last little while that imply that you're saying it for the theatre effect, and I'm going

to have to start clamping down even tighter than I am. So I'm asking all members to co-operate. You know what you cannot say, and I think it has to stop. Thank you.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to introduce a number of special guests who are here today to celebrate what would have been George Leslie Mackay's 172nd birthday. In the gallery today, I'm honoured to have Director General Hsu from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, as well as representatives from the Canadian Mackay Committee, Taiwanese Canadian Association of Toronto, Taiwan Entrepreneurs Society Taipei/Toronto, Taiwan Merchants Association of Toronto, Taiwanese Canadian Community Service Association, Formosa Evergreen Senior Citizens Centre, Taiwanese United Church in Toronto, Global Asian Business Federation of Canada, Young Taiwanese Merchants Association of Toronto, Taiwan Macroview Television, and many others. I want to welcome them all to Queen's Park and thank them for being here today to recognize the former life of George Leslie Mackay.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome a friend of mine originally from St. Clair Beach: Jordan Vukanovich, who's the national account executive with CareerBuilder Canada. He's here to talk about how we can match employees with employers and skill sets as well.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Sue Hotte from the Niagara Health Coalition. Natalie Mehra is here today as well from the Ontario Health Coalition, and a couple of my constituents, Don Huneault and Henry Miron.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not trying to bring attention to the issue, but just a reminder that all vibrating devices are picked up by the microphones and do impact our wonderful sound people. So please make sure they're in your holsters.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COLORECTAL CANCER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today in awareness of National Colorectal Cancer Month. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer to date and the second most common cancer cause of death of men and women throughout Canada.

Colorectal cancer is preventable, yet thousands of Canadians are diagnosed and die of this disease each year. The majority of cases begin as benign growths in the lining of the large bowel and then move onward to

other organs. Therefore, identification and removal of these polyps is critical in preventing the development of colorectal cancer.

Age, heredity, diet, weight, alcohol consumption and smoking are all factors in the development of this disease. More than 90% of cases occur in people aged 50 and over. Sometimes symptoms are not always obvious, but they could include blood in the stool, stomach pains and unexpected weight loss. The best way to prevent colorectal cancer is through preventive measures like screening tests. There are a number of screening tests available to Ontarians who may be concerned about developing this form of cancer.

Mr. Speaker, 800,000 Ontarians do not have access to a family doctor. Those between ages 50 and 74 can access a fecal occult blood test from their pharmacy, a nurse practitioner or Telehealth Ontario. Cancer Care Ontario continues to coordinate this service.

In Ontario, there is a 67% relative survival ratio, although in 2015 we saw 9,200 new colorectal cancer cases that caused 3,350 deaths.

Colorectal cancer is an increasing concern, and I'm pleased to note that March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HOCKEY ASSOCIATION TOURNAMENT

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's that time of year when, for a lot of kids, hockey season is coming to an end. A lot of playoffs are going on. The Little Current Howland Minor Hockey Association hosted the NOHA Midget House League Tournament of Champions in Little Current on Manitoulin Island—such teams as the East Nipissing Clarion Resort Vipers, Hornepayne Bears, Kirkland Lake Gold Blue Devils, Valley East Urban Windows and Doors, Little Current Flyers, Massey Predators, Po-wassan Hawks, and Temiskaming Shores Roosters Bar and Grill. These kids played like giants over the course of the weekend and had everybody on the edge of their seats.

I was watching some in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, particularly the Predators out of Massey. They had tenacity and never gave up in any of their games and continued to plug on.

We had the group from the Flyers from Little Current. They played an immense, powerful game. They had to win to get in. They were down 6-3. With about four minutes left, they came back to tie. They were this close to going in.

But at the end of the day, it was the Hornepayne Bears from Algoma-Manitoulin who got to the finals: kids like Eric Bayford, Silas Hoffman, Jaedyn Orr, Jarid Trudel, Cameron Boere, Mekenzie Kistemaker, Logan Latoski, Sawyer Stewart, Nathan Swereda, Nicholas Swereda, Curtis Swereda, Brandyn Bell and Tommy Prud'homme. You guys played like giants. You guys played with boys and girls. There was no contact, and it was great hockey, Mr. Speaker.

It doesn't matter who won. At the end of the day, these kids all showed end-to-end action, and they showed they had a heart of gold.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I didn't know the NHL was looking for a new play-by-play guy.

PATRICK ROCCA

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak about this year's winner of the Agnes Macphail Award.

Agnes Macphail, as you know, was once described as "the most important woman in public life that Canada has produced in the 20th century." She received this distinction as she was the first woman to sit in Parliament from Owen Sound and in the Ontario Legislature from a riding that encompassed my area of Beaches-East York. In her honour, I've asked Canada Post to put her image on a Canadian postage stamp.

The Agnes Macphail Award is given to an outstanding volunteer and contributor to community life who embodies Agnes's motto of "Think globally; act locally." This year, Patrick Rocca won the award for his outstanding commitment to the East York community.

Patrick contributes meaningfully to the spirit of the East York community through fundraising, volunteering and sponsorships. The community is pleased with his commitment because it is further exemplified by the many initiatives that Patrick supports and promotes, such as the Thorncliffe children's breakfast program, the annual Thanksgiving turkey giveaway, Flemingdon's New Circles and Maurice Cody's Dirt to Turf project.

Not only is he involved in various fundraising and community activities that support growth and development, Patrick also was the first real estate broker to become an ambassador for and a proponent of the inaugural wear Plaid for Dad event that was raising funds and awareness for Prostate Cancer Canada.

I stand in the House and formally recognize this outstanding citizen and member of the Beaches-East York community. I invite all interested members to show up at East York Civic Centre on Thursday, March 24 to see the Agnes Macphail Award ceremony where Mr. Rocca will be receiving his award.

GEORGE LESLIE MACKAY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On behalf of the people of Oxford and the Ontario PC caucus, I'm pleased to rise to recognize the contribution of Oxford's George Leslie Mackay on what would have been his 172nd birthday.

Mackay was born and raised in Zorra, part of Oxford county, but most people agree that the island of Formosa, now Taiwan, was his home. It was where he married and raised a family. It was where he made a significant contribution to health care and education that lives on to this day.

Mackay travelled to Taiwan as a missionary 1871. He quickly fell in love with the island and embraced the

culture, spending 16 hours a day studying the language. Mackay had an unusual method of outreach: practising dentistry. Over 30 years, he claimed, he pulled as many as 40,000 teeth. He returned to visit Oxford, and while in Canada raised money to help in Taiwan. When he returned, he built a hospital, a boarding school for girls, a middle school and Oxford College. The college is now a museum dedicated to Mackay, “the black-bearded barbarian.”

His legacy lives on to this day. In 2001, Taiwan issued a commemorative postage stamp that marked the centenary of his death, and there is now a modern Mackay Memorial Hospital in Taipei, a long way from the clinic he started 150 years ago.

As MPP for Oxford, I am also proud of another legacy he created: a strong relationship between Oxford and Taiwan, a legacy we honour by continuing and growing our friendship.

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this today.

MAYA MIKHAEL

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is always a pleasure to rise in the House to talk about special events and the incredible people of Windsor West and the greater Windsor area.

Today, I have the distinct pleasure of announcing that 10-year-old Maya Mikhael, an exceptional young lady from Windsor, is the recipient of the provincial honour of the 2016 Leading Girls Building Communities recognition certificate for exceptional leadership in working to improve the lives of others in Windsor.

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This recognition is only given to young girls 18 years or younger at the time of nomination, and the nominee cannot have been nominated in the past. Nominations for this recognition must be made by a member of provincial Parliament, and community members are needed to provide supporting references. Without hesitation, I was pleased to nominate Maya Mikhael for this recognition, and there was no shortage of supporters from our community. Through her various fundraising efforts such as Maya’s Friends lemonade stand, Maya has raised thousands of dollars and collected vast quantities of food that have benefited the Windsor area through organizations like the food bank, Street Help and the Windsor Youth Centre.

I am thrilled to announce that Maya has been chosen as the recipient for this honour and I am so proud to have an outstanding, dedicated community supporter like Maya in Windsor.

WESTON LIONS CLUB

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am proud to stand in the House today to recognize the 75th charter anniversary of the Weston Lions Club. The Lions Club of Weston was chartered in the town of Weston, Ontario in 1941. This group of dedicated volunteers has not only built the

recreation arena and swimming pool located at the Weston Lions Park but also continues to operate the arena, staff the snack bar inside and manage the recreation hall facilities. The Weston Lions arena is run as a non-profit operation to serve the community and raises money through the snack bar, a pancake breakfast at the annual opening of the farmers’ market, and through a partnership with the Toronto Blue Jays baseball club.

The club’s members are extremely dedicated and work tirelessly for their community. The Weston Lions Club has generously chosen to assist a number of local community and international organizations with their programs and projects, including Weston Area Emergency Support, which is a local food bank; Frontlines, a local organization that assists youth; TDSB’s Toronto Foundation for Student Success; Lions Foundation of Canada; Youth Without Shelter; York West Active Living Centre, which has many programs for seniors; and many other groups that have been designated by the Lions Club to receive gifts totalling over \$60,000.

Congratulations to the Weston Lions on your 75th charter anniversary. Thank you for all that you do for the Weston community and beyond. Your dedication to volunteerism and giving back to the community is truly inspirational.

WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to rise today in recognition of World Down Syndrome Day. Today marks the 11th anniversary of World Down Syndrome Day. This year’s theme is “My Friends, My Community.” The goal is to get the world talking about how inclusive environments benefit everyone. Down Syndrome International wants to show the world how persons with Down syndrome live and participate in the community alongside family, friends, peers and the public.

To get people talking, they are encouraging everyone to wear lots of socks, perhaps even three socks, for three copies of chromosome 21. The goal is to wear something that people will ask you about so that you can start a conversation about World Down Syndrome Day.

I would like to take a moment to recognize Amy Boudrias, who has done an outstanding job of raising awareness of World Down Syndrome Day in the Kincardine area. Amy has challenged local businesses to create fun and unique window displays filled with lots of socks. She had a tremendous success, and I know that many people will be having important conversations today because of Amy’s hard work.

We all know the power of an inclusive environment and of equal opportunities to participate. Today, let’s take a moment to think about what more we can do to make sure everyone has a safe and inclusive community to thrive in.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Mr. Yvan Baker: Last fall, I was in Ukraine with constituents of Etobicoke Centre, where we met with

soldiers who were wounded during the Russian-backed invasion of Ukraine. These young people said that they were fighting for freedom and democracy, values that we as Canadians hold dear.

Today, Ukraine is at war and the situation is dire. Russia has annexed Crimea, and Russian-backed forces have invaded and occupied part of eastern Ukraine. This war touches all of us, Speaker. Thousands are dead and one million civilians have been displaced. The soldiers I met with have shown incredible courage. They are fighting state-of-the-art equipment, in many cases with outdated weapons. Many have refused medical treatment so that they can stay at the front and continue to fight.

One of those soldiers is Nadiya Savchenko. She's a Ukrainian pilot who was captured and then transferred to Russia illegally almost two years ago. Ms. Savchenko is now being sentenced on fabricated charges in Russia and has undergone a trial that even the US administration has referred to as "farcical." She has endured repeated interrogations and solitary confinement. Recently, in protest of her treatment, she undertook a hunger strike, even refusing water.

Canadians from across the country have been protesting Ms. Savchenko's treatment, and I'd like to applaud the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stéphane Dion, who recently issued a statement calling on Russia to release Ms. Savchenko.

I urge the global community, including Canada, to continue to press for her release and to continue to support the Ukrainian people as they fight for their freedom. This is important, not only because Ms. Savchenko's human rights have been violated and she needs our help, and not only because the war is a humanitarian crisis and the Ukrainian people need our help, but because the war in Ukraine is a threat to freedom and democracy—values that, as Canadians, we hold dear.

SANDVINE INC.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with you and members of this House news of a very important announcement that took place in my region last week.

Fifteen years ago, the high-tech company Sandvine was just starting out, at around the same time that our local economy was in transition. We were losing low-skilled jobs. But today there's a much different picture in my region. Thanks to investments in innovative technology, we are seeing the growth of high-paying, highly skilled jobs. That growth has resulted in over 2,000 new tech companies being created in Waterloo region, generating over \$20 billion in revenue each year. That's an awful lot of jobs in a short amount of time.

One such investment is at Sandvine. I was happy to welcome the Premier to Kitchener-Waterloo last week to announce a \$15-million investment into Sandvine to support further research and innovation. This grant is going to allow them to create 75 new jobs, added to the 267 they already have. These are high-paying, highly skilled jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sandvine operates in a fiercely competitive global market and is now performing leading-edge work in cloud computing.

You see this around the world—in Silicon Valley, in Israel, in Germany: governments that are investing in the tech sector.

By our investing in our tech leaders in my community—this is precisely why we've been able to prosper in Kitchener-Waterloo. We call these the fast runners. I am proud of them and proud of the investments that we are making.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOMATO ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA CULTURE DE LA TOMATE

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 179, An Act to proclaim Tomato Day and to make tomatoes the official vegetable of Ontario / Projet de loi 179, Loi proclamant le Jour de la tomate et adoptant la tomate comme légume officiel de l'Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Heckling during introduction of bills?

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I thought so. Carried.

First reading agreed to.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do my job properly.

The member for a short statement.

Mr. Mike Colle: I never knew it would be so controversial.

If passed, this bill would proclaim July 15 of every year as Tomato Day in Ontario and would also proclaim the tomato as the official vegetable of the province of Ontario.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Hon. Michael Coteau: I rise to remind my colleagues that today, March 21, is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

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I have spoken on this issue in the past, and this year is especially significant for a number of reasons. Mr.

Speaker, 2016 marks 50 years since the United Nations General Assembly first proclaimed the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to commemorate the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, a terrible day when 69 people were killed in South Africa after police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration against apartheid. It marks 15 years since the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, a comprehensive framework representing the firm commitment of the international community to fighting racism and related forms of intolerance and discrimination worldwide.

In Ontario, we are shaped by diversity and distinct cultures. Ontarians embrace the wonderful diversity of race, culture and religion we have here today. Since 1962, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the first in Canada, has prohibited discrimination on several grounds, including race. These are strengths that we have built on in our province to continue to build a fair society.

My own parents arrived here when I was just a child, and they were drawn, like countless others from all over the world, by Ontario's promise of opportunity and cultural pluralism. But we know there is much more work to be done to fight racism, not just internationally but here in Ontario and across this country.

Many people in Ontario continue to face racism: people who are indigenous to this land, people of all races, ethnicities, creeds and cultures who are newcomers to this country or who have called Ontario home for their entire lives and who, every day, come up against economic and social barriers, including in education, the justice system, and the workplace. Over the years, there have been many advances towards a more equitable society, but we all know there is more work to be done.

We are committed to building Ontario up. We are committed to building infrastructure and creating jobs and growth. We are committed to investing in education, social services and poverty reduction. And we are committed to enabling more people to contribute to their economy and to helping every person in Ontario reach their full potential.

But we will not succeed on any of those fronts unless we bring down the barriers that create unfair outcomes, because strengthening our province includes a commitment to achieving real social justice and equity. It includes making Ontario a place where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and prosper.

We won't be able to achieve those goals without taking real, proactive action to address racial discrimination and inequity. It starts by acknowledging that racism does create barriers, and by understanding the experience of racialized people. From acknowledgement and real understanding, we can move to action.

Last month, I joined the Premier as we announced the establishment of the new Anti-Racism Directorate. The directorate will take an evidence-based approach to solving problems. In the coming months, I'm committed to engagement and collaboration with experts, key partners and those who have experienced racism to better inform our work.

As part of this directorate, I've already had the opportunity to meet with many community partners, including Colour of Poverty and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, to talk about issues related to race and how together we can make progress towards eliminating these issues. Every aspect of the directorate's work will reflect what the community sees as important. I think the people of Ontario and the people of this Legislature believe that this work is important. At every stage of the directorate, we will work to make sure our partnerships are transparent and accountable and that we build those principles necessary for continued change.

Our government is committed to addressing racism in all forms, including individual and cultural racism. We know that it's at the systemic level that government can be most effective by playing a lead role to eliminate racism. That real change will depend on partnerships with those who have the experience and expertise to get results.

We have a lot of work in front of us, but I know we can continue to build this great province. I know that our government and the people of Ontario are up to the challenge.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I just ran back from Elm Street. The YWCA is hosting an anti-poverty forum today, on the international day for the elimination of discrimination, about how it all ties in.

All these community groups that were there were networking. It was a very positive vibe. I think everybody understands that hate is now illegal, that discrimination is illegal, but that there are challenges that we have to address.

I'm reminded of how kids went to school and were taught the dangers of smoking. They went back home, Mr. Speaker, and they said to their parents, "You shouldn't smoke." I think that that's what we need to do. We need to reach out to the communities and focus on the children, but not just the children. We need to get the children to come home and feel confident enough and empowered enough to say to their families, "This is not right. The way you are behaving is not right," and to change that way of thinking, to focus on a better and more positive and a more inclusive community. It starts with one child and it grows from there.

We need to look at it as a puzzle. Having an anti-racism secretariat is just one piece of the puzzle. We need to do a lot more. We need to network so that all those puzzle pieces can come together so that it can work.

I want to mention today something that I'm a very big fan of, and that's the Tour for Humanity. I think many of you have heard of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. They really put their heads together and they created this incredible mobile classroom. With more than 10,000 students visiting their Koffler centre, they said, "We have challenges because

not everybody can come to us. How are we going to get to the communities?" It's easier said than done, but they were able to create a 30-seat, wheelchair-accessible, state-of-the-art, technically advanced classroom that presents information on the effects and consequences of hate and intolerance. They travel throughout the province, educating people from different personal and professional backgrounds and experiences, and provide education on historic events, focusing on how the events are relevant to both Canadian and global perspectives. The purpose is to inspire all of us, of all ages and backgrounds, and empower us to raise our voices and to take action against hate and intolerance. This all began just in 2009, which wasn't very long ago.

I think that we need to have more innovative means of addressing how our different communities interact with each other and how we are going to make Ontario be a world leader in anti-poverty and anti-discrimination. I think that with all the technology out there, which we often hear about here in the Legislature—with all the technology out there, there can be far more that we can do. I know that everybody's talking now about how the Amber Alerts aren't using proper technology. We need to address racism and poverty and community groups and health care. We have all this technology at our fingertips and we're just not utilizing it to the best of our ability.

I saw something just yesterday that was posted online. That was the report by the Toronto police department on hate/bias occurrences by victimized group. The numbers look quite small, and I think that in some major cities in the US they wouldn't think that it was necessarily possible to have low numbers. But there's still too much hate crime being committed and probably not very much being reported. In order of the groups most targeted for hate, the Jewish community, unfortunately, was first, LGBTQ, followed by the Muslim community and—they were really quite close—the black community as well, and then different communities where it's a multi-bias, and they can't really necessarily say that it's targeting one community or the other.

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I really hope that the anti-racism panel is going to bring in all the community groups I mentioned previously, that are meeting right now at the anti-poverty forum, to consult with them and have them on the panel so that much more can be done and so that it doesn't just turn out to be more photo ops; and that we actually accomplish something and don't have to keep having these discussions year after year, and we can stop having the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and focus on tomatoes, as the member just promoted.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, we know we need to fight racism everywhere, every day, but every year on March 21 we mark International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and all eyes should be on the issue.

Today, I am participating in the Racism Free Ontario forum here in Toronto, which that brings together indi-

viduals and organizations from across the province with the singular goal of eliminating racism. I want to give thanks to and recognize organizations like Colour of Poverty–Colour of Change and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, who are leading the efforts to ensure that Ontario achieves the goal of becoming a racist-free province.

Today, four key elements will be focused on, including employment, education, justice and health care, along with the newly announced Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate. When we look at these key areas, it becomes easy to see why they need our attention.

Take employment, for example: On Thursday of last week, the Toronto Star published an article by Nicholas Keung, their immigration reporter, titled "Jobseekers Resort to 'Resumé Whitening' to Get a Foot in the Door, Study Shows." Keung reported, "According to a two-year study led by University of Toronto researchers, as many as 40% of minority jobseekers 'whiten' their resumé by adopting anglicized names and downplaying experience with racial groups to bypass biased screeners and just get their foot in the door...."

"In the study, only 10% of black job applicants—created by researchers based on real candidate profiles—received callbacks for job interviews if they stuck to their African names and experience with black organizations. However, the callback rate went up to 25.5% if their names were 'whitened' and their black experience was removed from their resumé."

Education research shows that there is an obvious gap for people of colour. Unequal Access, a report prepared for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, noted that the high school non-completion rate is highest among aboriginal youth, compared to visible minority and non-racialized youth. Among Canadian-born youth aged 15 to 19 in 1996, about three in 10 aboriginal youth did not finish high school and were not attending school in the past year, compared to less than one in 10 among visible minorities. Further, it was proven that when racial minorities have attained a university-level education, they are still less likely than non-racialized groups to be in the top income quintile. About 38% of the Canadian-born non-racialized group with a university education were in the top income quintile, compared to 29% of Canadian-born visible minorities and 21% of foreign-born visible minorities.

In health care, racial inequality is most often indirect and systemic. From the under-representation of racialized groups in the medical profession to the delivery of culturally sensitive care, the challenges experienced by racialized groups are disheartening. We must also factor in the impacts of socio-economic status in health care. A statistic generated by the advisory committee on population health showed that when questioned about their health, only 47% of Canadians in the lowest income bracket rated their health as very good or excellent, compared to 73% of Canadians in the highest income group.

The stats from the justice community are even less hopeful. Right here in Ontario, the question of carding is

still unanswered, despite the practice being banned as it disproportionately affects black and brown men. To those who have not experienced racial profiling or do not know someone who has, it may seem to be nothing more than a mere inconvenience. However, racial profiling is much more than that. It is much more than a hassle or an annoyance. It is real. It is having real, direct consequences. Those who experience profiling pay the price emotionally, psychologically, mentally and, in some cases, even financially and physically.

We know that we still have much work ahead of us in Ontario to combat racism, and the newly announced Anti-Racism Directorate is most welcome. However, more important than the existence of the directorate will be funding it appropriately and giving it a mandate that will actually accomplish our common goal of creating a province free from racism so that every Ontarian can live with respect and dignity.

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

PETITIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

“Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

“Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

“Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

“Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman’s damning report on failed billing; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

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

“To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One.”

I fully support it, will sign my name and send it with page Sabrina.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, if you would indulge me for one minute, I’d like to introduce my guests from Welland who are here for the reading of the petition.

They were stuck in an elevator with me before question period and I was unable to introduce them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You now are standing on a point of order, correct?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I am.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you. Roscoe Reilly, Ron Walker, Wendy Brown, William Barnes, Kevin and Fleurette Gruhl, Tess Sotirakos, Sue Hotte, Don Huneault, Henry Miron and Larry Rosnick: Welcome to Queen’s Park. Thank you for being here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That’s not a point of order, but I’m glad you introduced your guests.

Now it’s time for petitions.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. These guests actually brought these petitions today.

A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the decision to close the Welland general hospital was made without consultation with the residents of south Niagara, and without regard for potential social and economic impacts of this closure; and

“Whereas the Smith report and recommendations to the government contained no evidence to support the closure of the Welland general hospital; no needs assessment for the residents of south Niagara; no costing of the entire restructuring plan; and no due diligence to mitigate the impact of poorer access to hospital care and services; and

“Whereas the catchment area of the Welland general hospital includes four municipalities, with a population of over 90,000, including a high percentage (+25%) of seniors and people living in poverty;

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

“(1) Stop the planned closure of the Welland general hospital;

“(2) Conduct a proper third-party evidence-based study to assess the present and projected health care and hospital services requirements of residents in the catchment area of the Welland general hospital;

“(3) Hold public consultations, not only during the assessment process, but also on the draft recommendations.”

I support these 20,000 signatures, I affix mine, and I will send it with page Ariel.

CAREGIVERS

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

“Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

“Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

“Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

“Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas’s bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario.”

I support the petition. I will give my petition to page Terry.

HYDRO RATES

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

“Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

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“Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can’t afford to pay more;

“Whereas Ontario’s businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

“Whereas the recent Auditor General’s report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

“Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven’t met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

“Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

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

“To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government’s current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills.”

I support this petition and have also affixed my signature to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to thank Mrs. Nancy Shank from Val Caron and Mary-Catherine Tremblay from Hanmer, both from the Catholic Women’s League, who collected the petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas quality care for the 77,000 residents of long-term-care (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families;

“Whereas over the last 10 years 50% of Ontario’s hospital-based complex continuing care beds have been closed by the” province and the province “does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in long-term-care homes....;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“(1) An amendment must be made to the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007) for a legislated care standard of a minimum four hours per resident each day....;”

“(2) The province must increase funding in order for long-term-care homes to achieve a staffing and care standard and tie public funding for homes to the provision of quality care....;”

They want “(3) To ensure accountability the province must make public reporting of staffing levels at each Ontario long-term-care home mandatory;

“(4) The province must immediately provide funding for specialized facilities for persons with cognitive impairment....;” and

“(5) The province must stop closing complex continuing care beds and alternative-level-of-care beds to end the downloading of hospital patients with complex medical conditions to long-term-care homes.”

I want to thank them. I’ll affix my name to it and ask Jack to bring it to the Clerk.

LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

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

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

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

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

Speaker, I agree with this petition. I affix my name to it and leave it with page Khushali.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special ... needs;

“Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

“Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

“Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

“Whereas the situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

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

“To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential.”

I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker. I’ll affix my signature and send it down with Jerry to the table.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

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

“Whereas the government of Ontario will require most seniors to pay significantly more for prescription drugs, starting on August 1, 2016, under changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit;

“Whereas most seniors will be required to pay a higher annual deductible of \$170 and higher copayments each and every time they fill a prescription at their pharmacy;

“Whereas the average Ontario senior requires at least eight different types of drugs each year to stay healthy and maintain their independence; and

“Whereas many seniors on fixed incomes simply cannot afford to pay more for prescription drugs and should not be forced to skip medications that they can no longer afford and to put their health in jeopardy;

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

“Stop the government’s plans to make most Ontario seniors pay more for necessary prescription drugs and instead work to expand prescription drug coverage for all Ontarians.”

I sign this petition on behalf of all Ontario seniors who are going to pay costly for this decision.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are critical transportation infrastructure needs for the province;

“Whereas giving people multiple avenues for their transportation needs takes cars off the road;

“Whereas public transit increases the quality of life for Ontarians and helps the environment;

“Whereas the constituents of Orléans and east Ottawa are in need of greater transportation infrastructure;

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

“Support the Moving Ontario Forward plan and the Ottawa LRT phase II construction, which will help address the critical transportation infrastructure needs of Orléans, east Ottawa and the province of Ontario.”

It gives me great pleasure—and I agree with the petition—to sign my name and give it to page Diluk, please.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I have a petition for 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 agree with this petition and I will hand it to page Samantha.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled “Stop the Plan to Increase Senior Drug Costs.

“Whereas the government of Ontario will require most seniors to pay significantly more for prescription drugs, starting on August 1, 2016, under changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit;

“Whereas most seniors will be required to pay a higher annual deductible of \$170 and higher copayments each and every time they fill a prescription at their pharmacy;

“Whereas the average Ontario senior requires at least eight different types of drugs each year to stay healthy and maintain their independence; and

“Whereas many seniors on fixed incomes simply cannot afford to pay more for prescription drugs and

should not be forced to skip medications that they can no longer afford and to put their health in jeopardy;

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

“Stop the government’s plans to make most Ontario seniors pay more for necessary prescription drugs and instead work to expand prescription drug coverage for all Ontarians.”

I couldn’t agree more with this petition. I affix my name to it and give it to page Terry to take to the table.

1350

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture.... Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified. Survivors too often face wait times for counselling services as our population grows and operating costs rise for sexual assault support services.

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

“Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment’s final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change; fund sexual assault support services adequately to meet the demand for their counselling and public education programs; address systemic assumptions within the current ... aid structure to ensure survivors are supported and not revictimized; and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining ‘unfounded’ cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice to survivors.”

I agree with this petition, will put my name to it and give it to Lauren.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

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

“Whereas Ontario already overpays for wind and solar power supplied by the FIT and microFIT programs compared to other provinces, including Quebec; and

“Whereas many townships have declared themselves unwilling hosts for industrial wind turbine developments;

“Whereas the IESO has ignored municipalities’ wishes and approved projects in unwilling host municipalities;

“Whereas the Auditor General identified that the global adjustment—the cost of overpaying for electricity

under the Green Energy Act—has cost Ontarians \$37 billion to date and will cost us another \$133 billion by 2032;

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

“To immediately impose a complete moratorium on all wind and solar project developments in unwilling host communities.”

I agree with this and will be signing it off to Jack.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2016 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2016

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2016, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I always welcome the opportunity to say a few words about Ontario’s fiscal situation, the state of our economy and, more specifically, budgetary measures that are before this Legislature.

There is concern out there, I would say, across the province. I can certainly speak for my riding. We’ve just come back from constituency week, so I had an opportunity to do some mainstreeting—quite a bit of mainstreeting, actually—and a lot of visiting in various towns in my riding. People are worried. A lot of it seemed to revolve around money. Now, granted, I was going in and out of businesses. There was a lot of concern. I think of a real estate broker who had been sitting in his office all day—not much business that day. But he still had to pay for his electricity.

Talking with steel fabricating—I was in and out of a couple of welding and fabricating businesses. They have a very good reputation. The stuff they do is amazing. The one shop had laid off a large percentage of their staff. The other shop—very small, family-run; both of them are family-run—would bring young people in, but they didn’t have the skills. They had the schooling, they had the training, but they didn’t seem to be up to speed and didn’t seem to have the interest. In fact, he indicated that some of them were a safety concern. Again, that was hindering that particular shop from expanding right now.

I did have a great time door-knocking. I started in Port Dover and then up to Waterford, over to Caledonia, Simcoe several times—a larger town in my riding—and down to Dunnville, doing a lot of visiting. There is concern out there. There’s anger. The anger is directed towards this government, by and large. I will say—and this is no surprise to many people; perhaps this is the nature when you have a party that has been in government for a large number of years, like the present govern-

ment—that much of the anger was very specifically directed towards the Premier.

I raised issues of what's going on here and raised issues of the budget that was presented a number of weeks ago. People didn't really have a lot of information about that, but they had a lot of information about their family, their neighbourhood, their town, and about the small businesses.

I did explain to people that, for whatever reason, this budget was brought down two months earlier. Maybe I'm not plugged in. I'm still not sure why it was brought down two months earlier. I really have no idea. Maybe during the two-minute responses we will hear the reason. But it was brought down two months earlier than normal, for whatever reason. The federal budget is coming down tomorrow. I find it unusual that a provincial, let alone a municipal, which you would never see, would bring down a budget before they knew what they were getting or the partnerships that were being negotiated at the provincial or the federal level. It's very, very unusual, and maybe we'll find out the reason why.

The result of bringing it down two months earlier: a lot of the numbers are missing. A lot of the answers are not there, the program details. Even though we've got a budget book—I don't have one at hand—with hundreds of pages, details are missing.

I personally feel that, at minimum, this budget should have waited at least until after the recommendations and the feedback from the pre-budget hearings had come in. Why do we have pre-budget hearings? This really flies in the face of any concept of citizen participation or public involvement in the affairs of the treasury. Why was this budget brought down before the report came in, the feedback came in?

I do sit on the finance committee, Speaker. We heard from hundreds of deputations in Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa and Toronto. People came into those cities from so many areas across the province at their expense, presented written briefs as well, and put a lot of work into their presentations, but before our committee could report on what they had said, the budget came down. The cart was before the horse.

My constituency office down in Simcoe in the Haldimand-Norfolk riding, after the budget, and even before the budget, received a fair number of calls. People who are interested in the programs want to know when they start. We would contact the various ministries—as you would know, an MPP would have access to liaison people—but we couldn't get answers from the ministries. We were told, "Well, there's no details yet," or certainly no timelines yet. Whether that relates to bringing down a budget at least two months before you should have, I don't know.

I represent a farm riding, an agricultural riding. Half my residents don't live in town; they don't live in a village. For farmers and small businesses, I think the reality is sinking in that there's a \$28-million cut to the budget for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. To me, this does not bode well for rural

Ontario, small-town Ontario, and parts of our economy, including much of the city of Toronto, that have an economy dependent on agri-business and food.

1400

There's no doubt that we're going to see further details on these program cuts. Very recently, we came to realize that the Rural Economic Development Fund—the RED fund—is on the chopping block. I forget the terminology that's being used; it's being transferred. It's being yanked out of agriculture, anyway.

I do recall, a number of years ago, as a former government member, that I sat on the Premier's Task Force on Rural Economic Renewal. We travelled the province; we conducted our own hearings for months and months. We travelled elsewhere—Saskatchewan and the states of Iowa and Illinois—taking a look at some of the best practices. We got out to Sydney, Nova Scotia, an area that, at that time, was just losing its coal and steel industry—a devastating effect. It was explained to us that in Sydney, Nova Scotia, everybody pulled together to try and deal with this devastating hit to a rural economy.

As far as the OMAFRA budget: Again, questions are being asked by farmers: "What is getting the knife specifically?"

I'd like to quote the CEO of Food and Beverage Ontario, Norm Beal:

"The lower Canadian dollar has had an impact on our ability to generate jobs over the last few years, and we're expecting that to accelerate. We are launching a major campaign called Taste Your Future because there aren't enough people trained in our industry to take these jobs. We need young people and new Canadians interested in our sector for jobs ranging from millwrights to food scientists and marketing people."

Last week, I did hear this: the concern of wanting to hire young people, wanting to expand a bit but not being able to find the skills or the kind of training that would be suitable for their place of employment, whether it was a very small steel fabricating shop or a very large steel industry.

Going back to Beal's numbers: He indicated that the food and beverage sector has 132,000 direct jobs and another 172,000 indirect, full-time positions. He puts it out as the largest manufacturing sector in Ontario—larger than auto—a sector that generates \$40.7 billion in revenue.

A ministry like the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is a very important ministry, not only for farming but for the food and beverage sector. I've just explained the significance of that sector in our economy. The concern is with the cuts to the ag budget, a ministry that is one of the smallest ministries in the province of Ontario. So there is concern on that front.

The recession in 2008: Ontario was hit, partly because of our dependence on auto. But at that time, the food and beverage sector continued to grow, and it grew 11% from 2007 to 2012. During these continued dismal times in the province of Ontario, and in spite of that, the ag sector—the food sector—continues to essentially operate in not

only a steady state but to grow, and this is positive. I would think that that is something we could capitalize on. To get into that debate of winners and losers, I know that this government does pick and choose, company by company, which is a bad idea, rather than sector by sector. Sometimes they pick winners; sometimes they pick losers. At the end of the day, we're just not sure how effective those kinds of company-by-company grants are and what is the positive impact, if any.

City of Toronto: second only to Chicago as a food processing hub in North America. But we've also got close to the highest electricity rates in North America. We have the highest debt load of any sub-sovereign jurisdiction on this planet, the highest subnational debt in the world. The Fraser Institute put out figures that Ontario has the second-highest combined provincial and federal personal income tax rates in the G7.

So just in context, a province with the second-largest food and beverage manufacturing sector on the continent, something to celebrate, something to be proud of—but again, how can we continue to maintain that, given the fiscal decisions that are being made within this province, most specifically and recently with the budget that's before us now for debate?

To get even more specific, in light of all this, where did the decision come from to cut the ag budget by \$28 million? What ag minister would stand up and be proud of the fact that he cut his own budget by \$28 million? Maybe the decision did not lie with the present Minister of Agriculture. The rumors are out there—the cut, the transfer, the elimination of the RED fund, the Rural Economic Development Fund. Again, why would we do this? Is there not confidence in our food and beverage sector, our agribusiness sector? The food sector alone purchases 65% of food-related farm production from growers in the province.

Just to reiterate, the ag budget is dropping to \$916 million from \$943 million. It is one of the smallest ministries. How do you measure that? Well, one measure is the elimination of the Local Food Fund. We heard so much about local food from the government members across the way. The Local Food Fund is being wrapped up. I raised this in question period. I was told, "Well, it's kind of being transferred"—I assume what's left of it, if there is any money left—"to the Greenbelt Fund." I'm not sure how that helps Windsor or Thunder Bay or Essex county. My riding is not in the greenbelt. Sault Ste. Marie, Huron county, Leeds-Grenville—there is so much of the province of Ontario that is outside of the green belt. There's no money for them but this Local Food Fund.

On the environmental front, OMAFRA won't be seeing any of the Green Investment Fund initiatives in this budget. Five or six other ministries will be. I remain firmly convinced, in the recognition that the climate is changing, that agriculture does have the answer, one of the significant answers for the sequestration of carbon dioxide. I'm not worried about carbon; people talk about carbon taxes. It's carbon dioxide; let's talk about carbon

dioxide. Forestry: There's tremendous potential within our forestry industry to sequester carbon dioxide.

There's another sore point that I did come across in my travels last week. The Ontario pension: Just to stay with the ag line here, farm operations, those that are incorporated, will have to pay both the employer and the employee portion of this proposed Ontario pension. It's a payroll tax. That's nearly 4%.

Certainly people across the north, across rural Ontario, farmers in particular, will be hit by the climate change cap-and-trade fuel taxes. We already have carbon taxes, essentially, on fuel now. They're called excise taxes; they're called road taxes; they're called the HST. When you put a litre of gas in your car, of the price you pay, 41% of that price is tax. That's like a sin tax, in a sense. Now, it's not as high as tobacco—that's close to 80%—although a very large percentage of people do not pay that tax; they go into the black market.

1410

Again, there's a 41% tax on fuel already, and really no bone thrown to agri-business. Fuel is a significant cost of not only putting in a crop and working up ground, but also harvesting, trucking and getting it to market. And for natural gas, again, no mention of assistance for a request for rural, small-town natural gas expansion, other than expanding the tax on natural gas.

I did hear about the concern from small business. It's a combination of electricity prices and increases in payroll taxes—in this case, for the Ontario pension. By extension, I was told they're just not sure, especially the smaller ones, how long they could continue. Will we see more doors closed? More job losses?

These are the people that are here now, running the businesses. What about those industries that might take a look at Ontario—or in this case, maybe they're taking a second look. Then if they take a third look, they realize the "made in Ontario" cost of doing business—they see the climbing cost of electricity alone; I hear this on the shop floor.

Going back to that Ontario pension: Of course, helping people save for retirement is a noble goal, but like everything this government gets involved in, they just don't seem to be able to get it right. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce would concur with that; 150 member businesses remain concerned that the Ontario pension payroll tax will erode the competitiveness of business. It will reduce the take-home pay of workers and, in their estimate, eliminate something like 54,000 jobs a year.

Couple that with the high price of electricity—again, there is a subsidy grant for those people who are willing to run their car with electricity, but there's no grant for those people who can barely afford to run their house on electricity, let alone heat their house on electricity.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House. Today I'll comment on the budget motion, as well as the remarks from the member from Haldimand-Norfolk.

He concentrated on agriculture, which is important in his riding. Agriculture is very important in my riding as well. Yes, there's a cut in the agriculture budget, which is perplexing to say the least, because agriculture does hold one of the keys to carbon sequestration. But what's perplexing is the cut, and some of the places where the cut is happening.

This province used to have two pasture management specialists. What they do is advise farmers on how to grow pasture, how to grow a crop that can graze ruminants, can graze animals. That's very important, because as agriculture progresses, we have to realize that we need more pasture, more grass to actually sequester carbon, so we don't have a monoculture. That's really important. A way to do that is to have someone who knows what they're doing, like pasture management specialists, of which we had two.

The province is so worried about greenhouse gases, and what's their response on small things like a pasture management specialist? "Well, one will do." One will do across this wide province? We talk about developing agriculture in northern Ontario; the conditions in northern Ontario are much different than southern Ontario. Perhaps the pasture would also be different.

Again, people who don't know anything about farming might think a pasture is basically a lawn: "Why do you need a specialist for a lawn?" But it isn't. Pasture management is one of the keys to carbon sequestration, yet this government is cutting instead of building.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: I want to make three points in my two minutes.

One is that the question has come up: Why was the budget introduced earlier? The answer to that is two things. One is that we are living in uncertain times. Ontarians feel that; we all feel that. We detected a concern and a need to know as early as possible what the plan for the Ontario economy was. Secondly, the cap-and-trade which we had announced needed the details released as early as possible so that they could participate in the 2017 carbon auction. So for those two reasons, among others, the budget was introduced earlier.

Two other points that I want to make about the budget. One is that there has been this criticism that there wasn't consultation. In fact, there were 20 in-person pre-budget consultation sessions conducted in 13 cities in Ontario—more than 700 people. There were two telephone town halls that reached more than 52,000 Ontarians. There were 500 written submissions. There were numerous online consultations, with more than 6,500 users, through the Budget Talks website.

Last, and in many ways not least, I want to speak to one item in the budget, and that is that, effectively, students from families with an income of \$50,000 or less are going to receive free university tuition. We are untapping a huge pool of talent which, if properly trained and educated, will serve this province well. It is now both the hope for that community and also the means for that

community to achieve a university or college education. That is one of the best news items in this budget. It's good for Ontario.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure to stand and add to the communications on Bill 173, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. It should actually be named, or renamed, I suggest, something along the lines of "no jobs for today and tomorrow."

You take look at it, and big businesses are leaving Ontario right now. We've got hydro rates that are going through the roof. Small businesses can't afford—owners of small businesses are working much longer and much harder.

Our wonderful member from Haldimand–Norfolk, in his 20-minute dissertation on this budget bill, talked about \$28 million that had been cut from the ag budget alone. Well, down in Chatham–Kent–Essex, my riding, there is some of the best agriculture land in Canada. We grow corn. We grow soybeans. We grow a fruit called tomatoes. However, we also grow over 500 industrial wind turbines, and you know what? It's been estimated that each one of these industrial wind turbines takes up at least three acres of land. Now, that's over 1,500 acres in the Chatham–Kent area alone which could have been used for prime agricultural development and yet has gone to these industrial wind turbines. No pun intended, but this government is blowing in the wind.

If you look at this even further, and one of the concerns I had—and we heard from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs talk about the number of consultations. Well, my concern is very simple, Speaker, and that is this: The number of consultations that were undertaken by the finance committee—they didn't even have a chance to finalize their report and submit it. It reminds me that this government just went ahead and created this budget. It's "Don't confuse me with facts. My mind is already made up."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, was pleased to listen to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk explain basically what it will mean to the people he represents. The first—and that is for his riding but applies to mine just as well—is the complete disregard for people's opinion, that you could have a finance committee which takes the time to travel with staff, with interpreters, with Hansard. All of those people travelled through the province so that people from Ontario could have a say into what the budget could look like. But all of this was pushed aside. The government was not interested in hearing what people had to say. They had already made up their minds. They knew better than the rest of us what was good for us.

This is insulting. It is disrespectful, and it has been noted. It has been noted in his riding, but it has been noted in my riding as well. Why did we bother? It was not easy in northern Ontario to participate in this. An

eight-hour drive to make it to the lonely northern sites where the finance committee came to, and all that for nothing, because what went on at the northern consultation came way after the budget had already been written, translated and put in print. This is not good, Speaker.

1420

Another part that he talked about was how agriculture was going to be affected. In my riding of Nickel Belt—people may not think of Nickel Belt as agriculture, but there is a lot of agriculture going on. Most of them have taken a serious step back since the horse racing has been cancelled. The only place in Ontario where horse racing was cancelled was in the north, the one lonely track. Well, that affects all of my farmers in agriculture.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Haldimand–Norfolk can reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the feedback and the additional comments about the lack of public consultation. In a sense, we did have the public consultations through the all-party legislative committee, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. The consultation was done. It's brutal: It's a lot of travelling, a lot of stops and hundreds of deputations. The problem was that we were still writing our report and summarizing what people had told us they wanted to see in the budget well after the budget had been tabled. The cart was before the horse.

I'm not faulting the Legislature, because the consultation was done. The thing is, the budget was moved forward two months—stampeded through. We were given some reasons quite recently as to why this was done. One was to shove through the cap-and-trade gas tax, which would be on top of the 41% tax already on gasoline. That's getting up there. You can compare Ontario to many competing jurisdictions in the United States. I think any trucker could tell us about that.

What I heard—and this is again what I saw in my riding—is that life's getting tougher. People are being laid off, regrettably. There are challenges in hiring, because it seems our education system is still not up to snuff as far as the skilled trades. All we had asked was for three things: affordable energy, better management of our health care system and a credible plan not only to balance the books, but to start chipping away at the debt. We did not see that, Speaker.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is always my privilege to stand in this fine Legislature and speak on behalf of my constituents in Oshawa. Today I finally have the chance to speak about this Liberal government's budget. It is a beautifully titled budget. It's called Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, which is a very hopeful title. However, as I've learned sitting across from this Liberal government, the devil is in the details, and a pretty title does not a strong piece of legislation make.

If we were going to better name it, it might be fairer to say “hardly any jobs today and likely even fewer to-

orrow”—and this is from me, and I'm an optimist. But with the way this government short-sightedly puts growth in the economy in its crosshairs, it is hard to be hopeful.

Let's talk about the budget. Let's first talk about how we got here. Since I'm still relatively new, Mr. Speaker, I still appreciate learning the process. I still appreciate understanding how Ontario's government works, or sometimes how it pretends to be working.

Back to the budget: I stand in this Legislature on a fairly frequent basis, and I give the government heck from time to time about not being accessible to all Ontarians. We point out when the government shuts down and rushes through debate, and when they spring big new bills on the rest of the Legislature and hope that we won't have enough time to inform or involve stakeholders. We see that this government's favourite toy is time allocation, which is speeding up the process and shutting down discussion. We know that this government hates to travel ideas and committees around to other parts of the province, like to my community of Oshawa. The Liberals are quick to point out that people in the north or rural communities can just as easily call in, that they don't need to have face-to-face submissions, but I don't think that's fair, nor do I think that is as effective as having a real person sit across from their representative government and look them in the eye. But from where I sit, that seems to be what this government wants to avoid: interacting with constituents and answering to them directly.

For the average piece of legislation, there doesn't seem to be the interest in travelling to different communities. With the budget, however, there wasn't really any way around it. The finance committee travelled to cities around the province and heard from many Ontarians.

I decided to sit in on pre-budget committee consultations in Hamilton. I heard from desperate Ontarians hoping that the government would address poverty and social systems. I heard from municipalities with specific requests. I heard from corrections officers imploring the government for necessary health and safety equipment and investment. I heard from Ontarians begging this Wynne government to stop the sell-off of Hydro One. I heard from people talking about our woefully underfunded health care system, and they shared very real examples of how bad things have gotten. Throughout the pre-budget consultations, there were countless submissions, written and in person. They were honest and they were raw and they deserved to be heard.

I don't envy anyone who makes decisions around the task of prioritizing such desperate and real needs, but that's the job. There must be careful, conscientious and responsible calculations and considerations when it comes to sorting through all of the needs and requests from across the province. Otherwise, why on earth bother with the committee process? If the decisions have already been made, then why go through the motions of collecting input from Ontarians?

I sat in for a day on committee. I watched the government members listen. I heard them asking questions for

clarification. I heard them thank each presenter. Then they spent the next week or two continuing to hear submissions. Research was compiling and organizing, summarizing and sorting the hundreds and hundreds of submissions.

I'll tell you what I think should have happened next: The committee should have presented its report to the Legislature. All of this information should have been taken under advisement, and then the budget should have been updated to reflect some of that input. However, Mr. Speaker, I'm learning that the process that should be often is not what happens when it comes to this Liberal government's interpretation of process.

You might recall that the budget was ready almost two months before it normally would be, and we keep hearing that again and again. So they were ahead of schedule. In fact, it was so rushed, Speaker, that the Premier has had to backtrack on details, likely because they were so hastily strung together that they can't even withstand criticism—but more on that later.

As I was saying, this budget came out way ahead of schedule. Why? Why the rush? What's the hurry?

This budget is pretty important. It's the budget for the government of the province of Ontario. It matters. It has far-reaching implications. The ripple effects of these decisions will affect everyone across the province. So you would think that it would be worth taking the time to do it right.

The budget needed to be written. It needed to be signed off on, translated and then printed, and that takes a while. In fact, I would challenge this government to prove that the final budget wasn't actually in mid-process while they were sitting across from Ontarians who thought they were being listened to. I'm sure that they will feign indignation at the very thought, but we do know that the budget was signed, sealed and delivered before the committee even had finished its report. The voices from across Ontario had their say merely for show. Isn't that awful? And we wonder why people across Ontario are cynical.

So here is our rush budget. The government is so afraid—excuse me—is so fond of its stretch goals—I wish they were afraid of stretch goals—and this budget is another perfect example. It has got some shiny distractions but very little substance.

Unfortunately, it continues down the path of death by a thousand cuts. When it comes to the average Ontarian household, life is just going to be more challenging. In fact, this government is again missing every opportunity to commit to providing the basics that we need across the province, basics like health care, jobs and education.

1430

So let's talk about health care. There were rallies outside of every single pre-budget consultation around the province. Organizations and everyday Ontarians were demanding that this government stop slashing and laying waste to our public health care system. They were begging for this government to stop cutting health care. They were loud and clear about the many ways to strengthen services and health care for everyone.

On a side note, Mr. Speaker, this government has denied every day and in every way that they are even cutting services. They play word games and try to out-clever Ontarians with their moving-target definition of "cuts." If it looks like a cut and it hurt like a cut and it bleeds like a cut and it festers like a cut—

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a cut.

Ms. Jennifer K. French:—this government will play games and say "Nope, not a cut." In Lib-speak, they might be clever and call it—I don't know—a temporary skin displacement, or a division of dermal continuity. But, honestly, a cut is a cut is a cut.

Case in point: In Durham region, we were the guinea pig when it came to cutting rehabilitation services, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. Non-acute, non-high-risk clients were suddenly no longer able to get at-home rehab services. When we did our digging—sure enough, no more services.

But fear not, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't a cut. It was a waiting list. Everyone who was eligible for services was now eligible to be on the shiny, newly created waiting list. Previously, they would have received services, but now, with new financial constraints, they were put on an indefinite wait-list, not cut. So, no services, but not cut. Just put in a box marked "If we win the lottery"—tantamount to a cut, but technically deemed wait-listed. Ta-dah. Liberal shenanigans. But I digress, Speaker.

Health care in Ontario is being attacked by this government, and I'd like to see them try to deny that fact. Let's talk about the new ways that's happening.

This budget nearly doubles the cost of prescription drugs for most seniors—doubles, for seniors—targeting seniors.

My grandma will be 95 on March 26, and that's no small feat. She still lives at home and is doing her best. She does need care at home. She needs access to affordable transportation. She needs me to visit more often. She would really appreciate a local grocery delivery service. What she doesn't need or deserve is for the government to pick her up and shake her to see if a few loonies fall out.

Making up the difference by fleecing our seniors is unconscionable. You want money coming in? Stop the sell-off of Hydro One, a revenue-generating asset. Stop scrounging in seniors' couch cushions and do something sustainable and think long-term.

Health care cannot be strengthened by a government that does not care about health, so I challenge them to actually care and want to make it better.

Speaker, I will fight for strong public services, and I will fight until the end for strong, properly funded public education. I came out of the classroom, and I maintain that education is the great equalizer. Every student deserves fair access to opportunity and a quality education. It galls me to no end that in this year alone, the government is slashing \$430 million from education.

Our kids deserve resourced classrooms and supported staff to facilitate their learning and growth. For perspective, in three years this government will have cut—

actually cut—\$1.1 billion out of education. Don't just think dollars; think supports, think services, think opportunities, and think the future.

Speaker, I've been mad at this government for a long time. In fact, it was the Liberals who wrecked so much, so fast, with Bill 115, and that's what inspired me to take action. So here I am, and while it feels good to have the opportunity to give them a piece of my mind from time to time—and I'm glad to be able to vote on the record against their short-sighted, damaging budget—it doesn't feel good to know that I can't stop them from pulling the rug out from under our kids.

They are hell-bent on underfunding and undermining our system and our students, but it's wrong. It is said that a penny saved is a penny earned, but what about a penny stolen? A penny stolen is one that could have been invested. Investing in our children and our students has value that none of us will ever be able to measure. But here we see, again, a government that is shortchanging their opportunities and potential. Shame on the minister and shame on the Premier.

Speaker, since we're talking about education, you have probably heard that this budget has been strategically marketed as the free-tuition budget, so let's discuss.

Personally, I know where I stand on education. Let's be clear: New Democrats support easier access to affordable education. Simplifying the student aid system sounds like a good thing. Student groups have been calling for change for years, and we support their work and their gains. But to call this free tuition isn't being entirely honest. Free-ish might be more clear. There are a lot of pieces that need to be addressed by this government so that students can budget and make plans. Professional program students don't know where they will stand. What is the cost, the real cost, of tuition? What does this government have to say about tuition caps? In the words of the government, the language around free tuition is "evolving." We hope that we all have a better understanding of what this government intends. We don't want it to be a clearish explanation when we finally get it. Students deserve to know how to plan for their futures.

So we know that free-ish tuition is stealing the headlines, but here is something the government isn't talking about when it comes to post-secondary education: On a per student basis, Ontario's universities receive the lowest level of public funding in all of Canada. Ontario has now ranked last on per student funding in Canada for six consecutive years. Also, tuition fees are the highest in Canada. So not only do we want students to have access to affordable education; we want them to know that it is quality education—quality education delivered by qualified and fairly compensated faculty. We want students to be able to afford a high-quality education.

You know what else, Mr. Speaker? We want them to graduate into a promising and optimistic employment landscape. But for 12 years straight, Ontario's youth unemployment rate has sat above the national rate. In Oshawa, as in Windsor, our youth unemployment rate is among the highest in the province and in the country.

Why don't we see anything addressing that in this rush budget?

What we do see in regard to jobs and the economy is the fact that the Liberals project that they will fail to meet last year's job creation goals by more than 60,000 jobs. So I just want to take a moment to point out that they can't even meet a target that they set. They made up the number, and they can't even reach it. So I guess we're back to stretch goals. But this government's inability to get it right or even rightish when it comes to job creation and employment has very real consequences in very real communities. Those 60,000 jobs would fill 10 GM centres; that's a lot of people with families and plans to make.

In 2015, Oshawa was among the top 10 cities with the highest unemployment rate in the country every single month except for one. Those are real people and real families that we are talking about. It was really, really disappointing that any attention to automotive in this budget was almost an afterthought. This budget laid out automotive as a bottom-rung priority, and we don't accept this. We need to see a comprehensive and properly designed manufacturing and automotive strategy that will strengthen opportunities in our communities. They're dropping the ball and, in the process, endangering our futures.

We know I wear a few hats in this role, one of which is the NDP critic for pensions. When our budgets were delivered to us in the Legislature on budget day, I immediately turned to the section on pensions. Ontarians are eagerly waiting to know the details of the ORPP as this government decides them. A bit of a background: Two thirds of Ontarians do not have a workplace pension. There is a savings crisis and we need to tackle it. New Democrats originally proposed a strong made-in-Ontario plan. Unfortunately, what we're seeing this government do is slowly but surely limit the potential for a strong pension plan.

To illustrate: Initially, the Liberals said it would be a plan modelled after the CPP and designed so it could eventually be incorporated into the CPP. There was talk of universality, and then they started to talk about ways to exclude people. Comparable plans went from defined benefit plans to—what we see them now trying to get away with as comparable, and therefore excluded—PRPPs, bank products similar to RRSPs that we've talked about in this Legislature that don't even exist yet. They went from everyone in to a plan that could exclude seasonal workers, contract workers and far too many precariously employed Ontarians.

We're going to have much more opportunity to debate and discuss the design of the ORPP, but here's what I wanted to highlight today. On page 151 of this budget, they have laid out a section called "Collaboration on a National Pension Solution." It says, "Ontario will work collaboratively and intensively with the federal government, provinces and territories to make progress on a CPP enhancement that addresses the needs of future retirees." Apparently, it's the province's view that "a

CPP enhancement must be timely and provide a level of adequacy and targeted coverage that is consistent with the ORPP.” Hmm.

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So, again, this government’s view is that a CPP enhancement must provide “targeted coverage that is consistent with the ORPP.” Pardon? They started this ORPP journey by saying that the ORPP would be modelled after the CPP and be designed to be incorporated into the CPP. Now they’re saying, in their view, that the CPP enhancement must provide “targeted coverage that is consistent with the ORPP.” Now they’re saying that the CPP enhancement should be modelled after the ORPP. They’ve switched.

I’d like to point out that CPP is a universal program for all—universal for all, not targeted. Targeted would indicate, again, that some will be excluded. For expansion to be targeted instead of universal, it would have to be designed differently, and creating a two-tiered CPP expansion is wrong and attacks one of Canada’s universal cornerstones.

Speaker, I’m almost out of time, and there’s so much more that is missing from this budget. This government loves to forget about farmers—as we’ve heard—about our northerners and anyone who needs affordable housing. The environment, too, has been laid out as a weak priority. In remarks from one of my colleagues earlier in debate, it was referred to as photo-op environmentalism. That stuck me because that’s just so well phrased: photo-op environmentalism. We will see a five-percent increase in gasoline, but why won’t we see that money go to green initiatives instead of into Liberal pockets? I guess for that to happen, they would have to want to make a difference, not just to make noise and not just make things worse.

To summarize: I do not support this government or its short-sighted, shallow, rush budget, quite simply because this government does not support our communities. It begs the question, Mr. Speaker: If they’re not supporting our communities, who are they supporting?

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, while I was speaking to my seniors last week, I did a little bit of homework and looked up, on the Statistics Canada website, the percentage of households by province in Canada who are spending more than 3% of their after-tax income on prescription drugs.

Even prior to this budget’s enhancements to the Ontario drug benefit, Ontario is, by a very large margin, the most generous province in Canada. On average, only about 3.3% of households spent more than 3% of their after-tax income on prescription drugs versus the national average of 6.5%. Alberta—and these are numbers that predated the collapse in oil prices—was 5.2%; Quebec, 9.5%; British Columbia, 5.7%; and Atlantic Canada and all of the rest of the provinces were in the double digits.

Now, Speaker, this is a budget that supports seniors actively. Some 170,000 more low- and middle-income

seniors will pay no annual deductible for their drug program, down from a \$100 deductible. Beginning this August—August 1, 2016—the income thresholds to qualify for the low-income seniors’ benefits are going to be raised by roughly a third for seniors and for senior couples, and that’s consistent with the guaranteed annual income system income levels.

The shingles vaccine—something we see on television advertised on the American channels mostly; something really didn’t exist until a few years ago—will be offered to Ontarians free of charge if you’re between the ages of 65 and 70, which is that age span where people are the most likely to benefit from the vaccine.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I’m pleased to stand and make a few comments on the speech given by the member from Oshawa.

She spoke about poverty. Certainly, poverty is an issue that we have in Ontario. You know, Speaker, there are more people using food banks in my riding than there ever were. In fact, there are more couples using food banks. These are couples that each have a job but they haven’t been able to keep up with their expenses at home, mostly due to the increase in hydro rates that has been going on for a number of years, mainly due to the fact that this government will not take the advice of many experts in the energy field and get rid of the Green Energy Act, which we’ve seen push hydro rates up to being unaffordable for many, many people in this province. They talk about more seniors getting drug benefits, but unfortunately, they can’t keep up with their hydro costs either, so they are giving with one hand and taking more with the other.

Certainly, we do have a poverty issue in this province, and it’s not being addressed the way it should be by this government. You cannot fool the people of Ontario into believing that they have it better than they did a few years ago, because they don’t. It just costs more to live in this province and, unfortunately, this budget is going to make it more costly to live in this province.

It’s been said many times that the government introduced the budget before the finance committee wrote their report. This is ridiculous. Why do we spend all this money sending these good folks around the province and then they write a budget before they even hear the report? It’s just totally ridiculous.

I heard the ORPP mentioned—and I guess I’m out of time, Speaker.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thought the member for Oshawa did a very good job in outlining what it means for the people she represents. Part of her speech that really resonated with me was her 95-year-old grandmother. As a 95-year-old, the opportunity to go back to work to increase your income is zero; let’s face it. Those people live on whatever income they have. As the government continues to make life unaffordable for them,

they feel squeezed. They feel stressed. With no way of increasing their income, they see their expenses going up, and that can be very problematic. She used an expression that says, “Why are we shaking down our seniors to see if a few loonies and toonies will come out of their pockets?” This is exactly the way they feel. This is wrong.

When the Liberal government was in campaign mode, they talked about pharmacare. Everybody knows what pharmacare means. It means care based on need, not on ability to pay. It means drugs based on whether you need them or not, not on the ability to pay. This is what they talked about when they campaigned. They touted their Minister of Health as being the one who is leading the charge for pharmacare for the entire country. Come election time, come the budget, they go in the complete opposite direction, where they say, “Well, some of you will be covered.” The number is clear: 170,000 people. They have repeated it 170,000 times. We all know it. What they don't talk about is that there will be one million seniors, like the MPP from Oshawa's grandmother, who will have to pay more. That's wrong.

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

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Je suis bien fière aujourd'hui de me lever et d'apporter ma voix aux commentaires qui ont été apportés par la députée d'Oshawa.

Par rapport à un fait très précis, du fait du manque de consultations, l'apport fait que le comité des finances n'a pas pris le temps d'écouter les gens. J'aimerais quand même souligner pour les gens qui écoutent, mais surtout pour les gens ici dans cette Chambre, quelques données.

I would like to share a few examples very precisely for the member for Oshawa regarding some of the aspects of where we consulted and heard what the people of Ontario had to say and how it actually materialized itself within our budget.

One aspect that I would like to share is in Hamilton, actually. We heard from a group, Bioindustrial Innovation—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was there.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you to the great member from St. Catharines here. The \$3 million will help support Bioindustrial Innovation Canada. That's actually on page 10 of our budget.

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The other one that I feel very strongly about—and I'm sure a lot of us here in the House, and particularly everyone in Ontario—is the fact that in Hamilton, Ottawa, where I was actually standing, and Thunder Bay we heard the need to invest in pregnancy and infant loss. That's actually on page 115; a million dollars has been allocated in this budget.

In Toronto, we also heard from the Toronto Atmospheric Fund. We will be investing \$17 million—on page 30 in our budget.

Also, all throughout the province, through consultation, we heard of the need for social housing. I was very

happy to hear our minister, I believe last week—\$178 million will be allocated.

Monsieur le Président, merci de m'avoir laissé la parole.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Oshawa has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to answer some of the questions and comments that we heard around the Legislature.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville: I think it's great that the member has recently been speaking to seniors. I think many of his colleagues should do that as well, and I suppose better late than never.

The member from Perth–Wellington: I appreciated his referring to food bank use and the challenges with expenses at home and, again, highlighting the challenges for seniors in our communities. When we're talking about drug benefits versus paying their hydro bill and their expenses, I think his comment was that the government gives with one hand and with the other takes away. And then after they've taken it away, they seem to give them a good smack with it, is how it appears.

The member from Nickel Belt: Thank you for your comments and reminding us what it means for real people. Yes, I have a personal example from my community and from my family, but we all do. We all know very real people who are “squeezed” and “stressed,” as you put it. It's great to be able to have a conversation about pharmacare in the Legislature. I've been hoping to actually have a sizable one, not just a two-minute opportunity, and to talk about care based on needs and not just the ability to pay.

To the member from Ottawa–Orléans's comment about lack of consultations: In my remarks, I did highlight that I went to Hamilton. I was there, yes, just the one time. I'm glad that this was a piece of legislation that the government couldn't avoid travelling. But being able to say that all of those consultations, all of the presentations, actually had the same opportunity to make an impression and be considered when, as we know, the budget was mid-process and the final budget could have already been translated and printed as those people were giving those submissions—that's not right or fair.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I've been watching the development of a series of policies that—sometimes we get caught up in looking at one budget. It's interesting to me, in the six years I've been an MPP, the incredible changes I've seen in my community; and I think for many of us here it's been similar.

I just want to start at the beginning of life. We now have birthing centres, which we just started. I was very fortunate to get one of those pilot projects in a low-income neighbourhood in my community. It's interesting to me to watch, in the year that that's been open, how much more control women have of their health and childbirth. Two of the large communities in that neighbourhood are indigenous communities. Seventh Genera-

tion Midwives Toronto operates out of there, as do a large number of Muslim women practitioners who are midwives. The cultural diversity in learning that is taking place between different types of approaches to midwifery is really a uniquely Canada experience. That was a major investment by this government into a more progressive approach.

I've also witnessed in the last six years, Mr. Speaker, early childhood education—K4, K5—in schools. We've had five years now of early childhood education in Ontario, and the results are astonishing. When you talk to teachers, when you talk to parents, when you look at the scores, those kids now in grades 3, 4 and 5 are doing extraordinarily well. The opportunities that I see for low-income families in Toronto Centre, as a result of kids who haven't even finished their elementary education, are extraordinary.

I also have a program, that many of us have, called Parents for Better Beginnings, which is another social policy of this government. I go and meet with them. They're mostly women. Some of them are from conflict zones where they've had family members shot in front of them. The kids have gone through terrible trauma. Many of them are trying to accommodate new cultures into their lives that are very different.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker—I made a mistake; I apologize—that I'm sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and the member from Newmarket–Aurora. I apologize.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Aw.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes, I screwed up. I make mistakes sometimes. I'm sure I'm the only one in the House who has ever made mistakes.

I've watched this Parents for Better Beginnings, and the interaction between that and early childhood education and the control that—these same women often were involved in the birthing centres. As kids get through elementary school—and the massive investments—I've got great new schools, like Nelson Mandela. The number of schools that have been repaired in my community is quite extraordinary, and I don't think it's different. The real estate in my community tends to be amongst the most expensive to repair, given downtown prices. It's one of the hardest places to site schools in Ontario.

Then they get into high school, and then what kicks in? Something that came out of low-income-neighbourhood folks in Regent Park called Pathways to Education. This is a way that students in high school can accumulate savings and financial assistance to help them through all the costs of post-secondary education. It provides mentorship and assistance and has also seen our graduation rate now jump from the high 60s to the low 80s over the last few years. I have kids who would have never graduated from high school, who are graduating with money in the bank and a sense of self-confidence.

Then this budget added another layer onto progressive politics. You can believe me: I represent a lot of families for whom household income is under \$50,000. Unequivocally, university and college just became free for

them. I don't think there's any doubt about that. So when you think of all the people out there in my constituency, like across Ontario, this is a phenomenal change. I was out in my community last week, as many were, and this is all I heard about—just the simplicity of people understanding a simple number. Then at \$83,000, I think the most you pay is about 500 bucks, which is a pretty good deal.

Quite frankly, if you go to George Brown or you go to Ryerson or you go to any of the universities—U of T in my part of town—they all have top-up programs that help students out with scholarships and stuff like that. So it's fairly easy for those folks to take what is an extremely low-cost education.

But this is progressive building.

Then my friend the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities—I had the great pleasure, under his leadership, of announcing our youth connections program. This is \$250 million that is targeted to kids who are having trouble participating in traditional school and education, and gets them connected.

I am seeing that program all across my community—Yonge Street Mission, dozens of organizations working with kids who are on the margins, pushing them back into the centre of opportunity again. It is a phenomenal transformation.

I listened to my friend the member for Oshawa and I don't know whether we live in the same province. I've lived in Manitoba; I've lived in Quebec. There is no place in Canada where that suite of support for children, from the point of birth with their mothers, through to getting an education for free—where anyone who is in the lower and middle end of income has more supports today in Ontario than just about anywhere else. I lived under NDP governments in Manitoba—some very good folks—but we never had this kind of range of services.

There's some income-testing here. People who make what most of us make in this House can afford to pay. I pay for my nephew, who is struggling. I pay for his tuition at George Brown and incented him to do that. His mom wasn't able to help out in the way that she wanted. We all help out in some ways. Today, I probably wouldn't have to do that, and I could make investments in other parts of his life.

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On the employment side, there's this idea that we don't support over here, which is revenue-neutral carbon pricing. Please explain: revenue-neutral to whom? To us, as the government? If you actually look at it, please find me a successful model. British Columbia is projecting a 32% increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

The party opposite has a little secret they don't want to share with us, Mr. Speaker. It's very hush-hush over there. They love to talk about carbon pricing but they won't tell you what the price is. We're telling you what the price is. It's set by a carbon market, on supply and demand; it will be about \$17. You'll know what it is at the pumps. The model that they're suggesting is that we have to vote on it in this House.

To meet the federal objective—which is 14% below 1990 levels, according to all the leading economists—if you use the BC model, which they're so enamoured with, it would be 160 bucks. Now, what is it in BC? It's been frozen since 2012, because if you don't have a cap-and-trade system, you're relying purely on price. They've frozen it because they didn't have the will to actually set the price high enough to deter greenhouse gas emission reductions. It's frozen until 2018.

So what are you going to do? A little transparency across the aisle would be nice. Are you going to vote through a \$160-a-tonne price? Because to get any reductions out of it, that's the kind of price you're going to need. Are you going to vote through a \$30-a-tonne price? That's still about twice of what we're proposing, but we have a capped decline rate of 4%.

And how are you going to help families who have no money? People on low income, unless you're going to write very big cheques, are not going to get any material amount of money to help them buy an electric vehicle or get a bus pass or a transit pass. We're providing that kind of direct assistance, much in the way that others did, Mr. Speaker.

This budget proposes how that money will be spent. It has to be spent in measurable GHG emissions, and we have to report on that, and do that up front. This \$1.9 billion may sound like a lot of money until you realize that you have to help every Ontario family retrofit their home, buy a low-carbon vehicle, get low-carbon technology in their home and replace that fossil-fuel-intensive heating and cooling system. It's not revenue-neutral to most working middle-class families; it's pretty expensive for them.

The same philosophy that I just talked about that's giving all of these families a leg up: Pathways to Education, access at free or low cost to universities and colleges, birthing centres, and youth connections—\$259 million, giving young people the ability to get a job. That \$1.9 billion, when you retrofit every single building in Ontario—that will be one of the biggest job booms.

The other thing that's interesting is that as you insulate all those homes and you retrofit all those buildings, they become less expensive to operate, because you have a more affordable platform. You see that in Switzerland and you can see that in other jurisdictions that have done these kinds of programs, because a net-zero carbon household is one that's generally generating its own power. You can see in my friend the MPP from Barrie's town the amazing work done by Royalpark Homes, where they're selling houses with very low—or almost no—power or home heating bills. The Conservatives don't support that, Mr. Speaker. They can't even tell you what the price will be, never mind that it is not neutral to anyone.

Mr. Speaker, I will turn it over to my colleagues. Thank you for your patience in listening to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to the budget bill and to follow the

great comments that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change was sharing with the House.

Mr. Speaker, when I transitioned from municipal office to Queen's Park, I was very excited about the various initiatives this government was undertaking: the reversing of the download on municipalities, and the investments in education, in health care, and in public transit—those things that we very much needed. I'm very pleased to be able to support a budget that continues that work.

With the change from municipal politics to provincial government, my perspective has also broadened. Also, my own life circumstances of being a parent have caused my views to be broadened. So I'm very enthusiastic about some of the changes being made to education, from early childhood education to later on.

I have a young daughter. She benefited tremendously from full-day kindergarten. By the time she's going to post-secondary education, I imagine that the measures being put forward today aren't necessarily going to be of need to her and our family. But I think of the many other children that I see, the many youth that I see, who really struggle about what they're going to do after high school, because they don't see a path to post-secondary education, because the day-to-day struggles of life for them and their families are tremendous. When I can go out to those young people and tell them what the opportunities for free tuition for lower-income families are, I think that is a tremendous initiative that's going to help so many young people.

Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat puzzled, because I have been following carefully, over the last number of years, what different parties at Queen's Park are promoting. I know that all parties were very concerned about ensuring that there was a good spectrum of care for children with special needs. This budget is proposing—I'm trying to find the specific number, Mr. Speaker—significant funding for children with autism and special needs—

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It's \$333 million.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's \$333 million, Mr. Speaker. That is something that I know all sides of the House were calling for. It's a great day in Ontario when we can actually move forward on the recommendations of the select committee and provide those services.

Again, as a parent, I interact with a lot of other parents with children who have special needs in the school. I'm very heartened to see that for those families which have particular struggles, there's something in this budget for them to help them and their children to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that this government demonstrates the flexibility that is required to look at the way that we do programs for various issues—and we look, whether they're effective or not. When we see that there's a way that they could be made more effective, we enact that change.

So when I see the change in the way that some of the business grants are going to be handled, I think that is a great thing that is proposed in this budget that is going to help us target those resources, those sectors, those

industries and those businesses that will most benefit from that provincial assistance, so that we can continue having an innovative economy and create those jobs for the 21st century that are being created each and every day in Ontario.

I'm very pleased to see the improvements to health care that are being proposed: once again, a \$1-billion increase to funding the health care system, and specifically, also, \$345 million for hospital-based funding—very important for those hospitals in my community that my constituents depend on, like St. Joseph's hospital, Trillium and William Osler further in the north. All of these are important features in this budget.

Unfortunately, my parents passed away some time ago, but I do have very loving and wonderful in-laws, who are seniors. I can see the benefit of some of the programs that are being offered here—free shingles vaccine, which I know my mother-in-law is very interested in, and some of these other things that are very important for seniors in this province. We're building upon the supports that we provide for them.

All in all, for young people, for seniors, for businesses, for everyday Ontarians, I see much that is good in this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Have you got Michael Warren's column to read?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Yes, we'll read Michael Warren's column shortly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to speak to Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act.

I just wanted to start off by saying that in my travels in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, I've had the opportunity to talk to a number of people, individuals, a number of businesses and a number of organizations, not only about the budget but about our economy in general.

I know that there was and is still, to some degree, a large amount of concern about the economy, primarily brought about by the fact that oil prices have collapsed and a number of Canadian provinces have been hit exceptionally hard by the collapse of those oil prices. You can't seem to pick up a newspaper today without reading about some economic malaise. But the story is better in Ontario than other provinces.

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I'm delighted that the budget came in when it did so we could dispel some of the negativity, some of the concerns that I think were invading our collective psyche, if you will, that everyone in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora—or a large number of people in my riding—were very concerned that Ontario was falling into the same economic issues that have impacted Alberta, Saskatchewan and others. Certainly, there have been challenges, but we, as has been proven and shown, are doing better than most. So I was glad to see the budget come in when it came in.

I know in my riding that we have rebounded from the downturn in auto parts manufacturing. We have moved

into high-tech auto parts manufacturing. We have also moved on to other types of manufacturing, whether it be aerospace or else—we've diversified, and our economy has come back to a large degree.

In being out in the community, whether it's at a birthday party for a 90-year-old—as I was on Sunday; I had an absolutely delightful time—or talking with students at one of our many local high schools, I'm always asking people questions about their future and how they're feeling today. So I just wanted to make a few comments in terms of what's important to the people in Newmarket–Aurora in Bill 173. I'll tell you right off the bat that people are delighted that the deficit has been reduced to the level that it has been reduced to, and that the government is keeping its promise to drive that deficit to zero in the next budget. I think there were some skeptics out there, but I think we're doing better than where we said we were going to be. The public has noticed that and are quite delighted about it.

One of the other things that has been well received in the riding of Newmarket–Aurora is the tuition changes and the fact that average college and university students with family incomes of \$50,000 or less will be able to graduate with no provincial debt. I think the most important thing about that is the fact that it has opened up opportunity for a wide range of students in my community who otherwise wouldn't even have considered going to college or university. They can now consider it, and I think that in itself is one of the most important things that we could do.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Very quickly, Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act, should actually be called, "No jobs for today and let's hope for the best in the future."

First of all, I want to start with the positive. The positive is this: I saw more money put in for hospices, and I want to congratulate the government. I know it's an oddity, a rarity, for a member from the official opposition to compliment the government on that. But I will say this: that in Chatham-Kent, the grand opening for their hospice is on April 5, and the grand opening for the Leamington hospice is on April 6. But that was long before this budget was put in place.

Now, let's talk about the budget itself. When I look at the budget and I say to myself, listening to individuals—

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I know. They're a little bit distracting—Norm.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to call the House to order to allow the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex to make his points.

The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. No, he wasn't heckling; it's just that he's passionate.

When I look at the budget and I look at the hospices, that's a good thing. But then I heard the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore talk about the free tuition. We're

all for education, on this side, but you know, they say the devil's in the details. Of course, the Premier this morning was challenged in question period about her comment about free tuition. Well, then, what I meant to say was—I'm looking at it and I'm saying, "Hold on a minute. We did some calculations over here, and 30% of students may be eligible for that tuition."

You would say that's a positive, but here's the downside of that: We have a lot of businesses leaving the province, small businesses that are hurting. Why is that? Their criteria are that \$50,000 or less combined income will allow their children to have free education. Well, how sad is that, really, when a combined income is under \$50,000?

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to respond to some of the remarks that were offered by the government members about their budget and to share some of the perspectives of the people that I represent in London.

Like all members in this chamber, last week I spent a meaningful time talking to constituents about some of the issues that they face. Quite frankly, Speaker, we have a crisis in health care in my community. One only has to look at the media stories that were reported last week during March break.

We heard about a 10-month-old baby who went in for routine surgery at London Health Sciences Centre. We all know about the March break slowdown in the surgery schedules. The hospitals can't afford to have staff there because they are trying to work with a budget that won't allow them to run their operating rooms. This 10-month-old baby was made to wait in the hospital for two days without being fed—with no food. She was gnawing at her hands and she was crying with hunger because the hospital could not accommodate her in the surgery room.

The London Health Coalition held a town hall in London and pointed to the crisis in London's health care system. We heard about the bottleneck in discharging patients with serious mental health issues because there is no supportive housing or affordable housing in the community. As a result, people are coming into emergency and being forced to wait in the emergency room and to sleep on the floor for days and days before they can access health care.

Speaker, the 1% increase in operating budgets for hospitals in this province is going to do nothing to address these very real concerns in my community.

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

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: J'aimerais débiter en souhaitant à tous les Francos et Franco-Ontariens et francophiles une bonne journée, la Journée internationale de la Francophonie qu'on célébrait hier, le 20 mars. Je sais qu'à travers la province cette semaine on célèbre la Francophonie. J'aimerais juste utiliser un petit peu de mon temps pour parler de ça et pour souhaiter bonne fête à tous les francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario.

Écoutez, je veux parler pour les gens de ma communauté d'Ottawa–Orléans puis apporter une voix francophone par rapport à des choses très spécifiques qui sont importantes de souligner. Le membre faisait référence au logement abordable, puis on vient d'annoncer 178 millions de dollars qui seront disponibles pour les gens à travers l'Ontario au niveau du logement abordable. On sait que c'est un enjeu important, et on l'a entendu tout au long des consultations publiques.

J'aimerais aussi parler un petit peu pour les aînés. On parle des aînés; on fait toujours des références aux aînés. Partant d'une expérience avec les aînés pendant 17 ans, je sais qu'une partie très importante, c'est le vaccin du zona. C'est quand même quelque chose de très significatif, et on va l'offrir gratuitement aux aînés de l'Ontario qui ont entre 65 et 70 ans. Ça, c'est une économie pour eux d'environ 170 \$.

J'aimerais aussi parler—on en entend un petit peu—des soins palliatifs. Mourir avec dignité, c'est quelque chose que le gouvernement et qu'on a entendu, encore une fois, durant toutes nos consultations. Nous allons investir 75 millions de dollars dans ce domaine-là.

Les stationnements : nous allons permettre des réductions allant jusqu'à 50 % au niveau des stationnements dans les hôpitaux pour les usagers fréquents.

Merci, monsieur le Président, encore une fois, de me laisser la parole.

1520

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We have said from day one that this government is not paying attention to the people of Ontario. They sent us on pre-budget consultations which were absolutely nothing more than a sham, according to this government, because while we were out having public consultations, on January 27 this government had already sent the budget to the translators. So it's pretty disingenuous for this government to stand here and tell us that they had any desire to listen to the people of Ontario when, indeed, not only did they not listen to us, they had already crafted the budget before we set out on our pre-budget consultations.

Now, today, it is reported in the media that January 27 is the day that the government first sent the translators the documents, and this is long before—not only would they not have had a chance to process the pre-budget consultations; the pre-budget consultations were still ongoing. So how can this government ever stand here and tell us that they're open and transparent and they care about anything that the people of Ontario have to say when we have said, and are now proved correct yet again, Speaker, that this government sent their budget to the translators and to the printers? They sent it to the translators—we were still meeting in pre-budget consultations.

So never again will we trust a word that this government says. It's impossible to take anything they say seriously when they're caught yet again in another one of their schemes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments.

The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I just want to touch on the issue of seniors. My mom—hi, mom; she’s watching now so I’d better be well behaved—and my Aunt Anne have lived in several provinces. As my career has sort of gone around, my mom has come with me. I have this little five-foot-two Ukrainian dynamo of a mother in my life whom I admire greatly. It’s interesting, because having lived in the Quebec and Manitoba health care systems, she’s never had anything as positive an experience as here, including the drug plans. When we say that these things are more affordable in Ontario, in my family that has actually meant an extraordinary—and to see her wellness—I won’t say her age because she’ll get very upset at me. I’m 58, and I’ll let the rest of it go to you. But she is extraordinary. It’s phenomenal, in the drug plan and the changes and some of the amendments that are made, that she’s now in the lower category. As she gets older, her income is more modest, but it’s phenomenal to see the home supports, the improvements in PSWs. Could it be better? Yes, it always could, but I think you’d be challenged to find a place where it is healthier in Canada to be a senior where you have more choices than that.

I’m also saying that we’ve just governed through the worst recession in the last century almost and out of the collapse of banking. We bailed out the auto sector. One of the members said that the auto sector was on the lowest rungs. How many billions do you have to—I think it’s \$6.8 billion to revive a sector that is making more automobiles and contributing more to our GDP than it ever has—more than saved it; it’s exploding. Now we’re making massive investments in electric vehicles and helping monitor that technology. Find a government somewhere in the world that has invested the way we have in the automobile sector, and will, as we move to that.

I don’t know what the NDP’s standards are, but it must be free trade. We’ll be back at balance next year, Mr. Speaker, which is a phenomenal accomplishment given the massive reinvestment—a phenomenal accomplishment. Best budget, toughest times—things are getting better.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s my pleasure to speak to the budget.

I just want to start off by saying that I’m going to reiterate what, as I walked in—to think of the budget, to talk about the budget and what my expectation was. There were three things, similar to our party. (1) I wanted to include a credible plan to make energy affordable in Ontario; (2) to include a plan to properly manage Ontario’s health care system to ensure that the services and programs are there when people need them; and (3) to include a credible plan to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down the debt.

Instead, we received higher debt, higher interest payments and a rising cost of living. Life is harder for every Ontarian under the premiership of Kathleen Wynne and her Liberal government.

This is the ninth budget in a row that the Liberals have posted with a multi-billion-dollar debt—at \$308 billion, up from \$296 billion last year, a \$12-billion increase. This is the highest debt ever in the history of our great province. This translates into \$22,103 for every single Ontarian. When I look at these pages who have just joined us today—welcome to Queen’s Park. I hope you enjoy your experience. You are in debt \$22,103. A couple of my colleagues have become grandparents since we’ve been here. Their grandchildren start off in their life \$22,000 in debt. Anybody listening, anybody at home, anybody in this House who understands debt knows that once you get that far in debt, it’s very, very difficult to come back out and actually have money to spend on the things you want, unless you can lower and get out of that debt hole.

It took the Liberal government 12 years to double the provincial debt. Under this tenure of the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals—12 years—they’ve actually doubled the provincial debt. None of the 23 Premiers prior to them did this.

Interest on the debt will be almost \$12 billion. That’s six times more than what is spent on agriculture, the environment and natural resources combined.

Mr. Speaker, I’m going to read a list to you. The combined total expenses of the following ministries—aboriginal affairs, agriculture, Attorney General, citizenship, energy, environment, finance, francophone affairs, government and consumer services, labour, municipal affairs and housing, natural resources, northern development and mines, Treasury Board Secretariat, economic development, and tourism, culture and sport—would still not equal the amount paid to service the interest on the debt.

When I’m in my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, or I’m out speaking to a group in the public, I ask them the question: “Can you tell me what the three biggest expenditures of the provincial government are?”

Typically, most people say health care, and they’re bang on, as it should be. Health is the most important priority we all should treasure when we’re here as legislators.

Number two is education. Again, everyone agrees with that; everyone concurs. It needs to be number two.

When I ask for number three, most people start to falter. They don’t really want to answer or they don’t know how to answer. Many will say community and social services, the most needy needing those services. No, Mr. Speaker. The third-largest expenditure by this Liberal government is actually payments of interest on the debt that they, and they alone, have accumulated—\$12 billion.

I talk about that a lot because really, in my job, every day that someone comes into my office, or I meet them on the street, or I’m out at a public event—I’m fortunate

enough to be out seeing a lot of people—what we have to talk about is what the realities of government are, what services we're not providing.

Almost every group that comes through, whether it's seniors on fixed income, whether it's people looking for children's services, like mental health or special needs, seniors who can't afford their hydro payments, when they come through my doors, what we talk about is where the money is going. They've had record revenues over the last number of years, this Liberal government, and yet they still add to our debt, add to our deficit.

With \$12 billion, we could fund a year of long-term care for 222,043 seniors. We could fund 44,120 beds in palliative care units for one year or 40,347 hospital beds for one year, yet we're hearing about hospitals being closed and beds being closed. We could fund 169,052,488 MRI scans.

Mr. Speaker, all of those things that I just told you, we're not getting. You know why? Because that money is going to pay interest on the debt that they've accumulated.

We all have limitations. We all have our own personal budgets, our family budgets, our home budgets, our business budgets. We all know it's fundamental that you have to be able to run your fiscal house if you're going to enjoy the things you really want in life. Speaker, the high debt payments are taking money out of public services.

Again, a few years ago, I was the community and social services critic. It was always appalling to me when I thought of the things—when people came through my doors, in their greatest need, looking for help for their loved ones; when they came through from Community Living; when they came through looking for affordable housing; when groups like the food banks and people like the United Way came through, asking to help those most in need in our society, yet I had to tell them that this government chose to spend money and to add to that burden of debt rather than services that we could be providing. I say to them, “What could we be doing in your backyard, in your service, in your association, if we had \$12 billion to the positive and not \$12 billion to the negative?”

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Community safety and correctional services: No funding was announced to support the recent PTSD legislation, Bill 163, and yet the government professes that they're going to fast-track and make this a priority. It's interesting that they say one thing, but where is the action to follow that up?

They continue to download court costs onto municipalities. There's no funding to assist police services when they're responding to calls where persons are in mental distress. That's becoming an increasing concern of municipal police forces that talk to me—and our OPP as well. There are a lot of people now calling for those services, and the police are dispatched, with no additional services, to actually come up and provide those types of specialized services.

Municipal affairs and housing: Not one Small Communities Fund grant was given to municipalities in my

riding this year, despite, if you think about rural Ontario, the significant assets and the number of bridges. In my two ridings alone, we have 300-plus bridges that all have to be replaced and maintained, because we have to get the goods and services to market. Many of the natural resources come from our rural ridings—our food, the staple of everything we live on, which has to travel the highways, the bridges and all of that infrastructure that we have; the water, to ensure the safety of our residents; the sewer systems, again to ensure the safety of our residents—yet not one of those communities got it.

It cannot continue to fall on local municipalities to pick up the downloading because of their poor mismanagement. They cannot continue to fall back on property taxes, because we do not have the population bases to sustain such significant increases.

Mr. Speaker, on a very specific point, there was no money to boost things like the Warton-Georgian Bluffs airport. That's one of those things that is fundamental to an area like ours, to ensure the safety of our residents and the tourism industry.

Infrastructure and transportation services in rural and northern Ontario: I was pleased to see the Connecting Link Program revived for vital road and bridge improvements, but transportation continues to be non-existent in our small rural and northern communities. These communities continue to be shortchanged by this Liberal government, receiving \$5 million less than almost a decade ago—after the Liberals initially cancelled the Connecting Link Program in 2013—and receiving less than their fair share of the gas funds. Every year, I say in here, “Who spends more gas than you in your riding, travelling around?” Our farmers, our agricultural community, our small businesses need to be able to go those expansive distances to provide the services and programs, and yet we do not get our fair share of the gas tax funds.

Overall, the costs in almost all walks, in all industries, are increasing. Life is truly harder under Premier Wynne and her Liberal government.

Last week I was out in the community a lot, and I went into stores. I went into grocery stores. I went into M&Ms. I went into manufacturing businesses, production companies. The apple industry: I sat at a politicians' meeting, and I talked to someone from the apple industry and the horticultural industry. They had said to the government, “You're putting us out of business because of your increasing high hydro costs.” They asked for some form of an industrial rate or a special rate.

Vic Fedeli, our critic from North Bay, Ontario, told the story—and he tells it often—that he was down visiting someone in Chatham-Kent-Essex. They were investing \$100 million in a new greenhouse. They were going to create 100 new jobs. Vic was ecstatic. He thought, “This is good. This is something I want to congratulate.” Then the owner turned and said, “And I did it in the States, because you're uncompetitive because of the current way the government's going.” Mr. Speaker, that's a sad story. We have the ability. We have the

workforce. We have a proud province that wants to lead our Confederation, but we need the government to turn tracks.

Drug deductibles for many seniors will nearly double to \$170 from \$100. A 4.3-cents-per-litre hike in gasoline taxes: Premier Wynne promised there would be no gas tax increase prior to the 2014 election. How quickly they change course.

A \$5-per-month increase in natural gas bills and propane: There's no guarantee it even goes to environmental needs. This is going to go to a slush fund to cover their mismanagement, their incompetence, their scandals and all of their overspending of the last number of years.

There's a 4.7-cents-per-litre increase in the diesel price, thanks to the direction that they're going in. Again, our small contractors, our large contractors, our farmers, our people out in rural Ontario who actually drive the economy through these—these are necessities, to have vehicles that are going to carry the goods and services to market, and they're going to pay significantly every time they stop to fill up at the pumps.

The sin taxes: Everybody knows that there's an increase in wine and cigarette prices and those taxes.

In agriculture, the apple industry: I asked this Liberal government in 2014 in this House to invest \$25 million over seven years to revitalize Ontario's apple industry. I'm told by the industry that they can totally revitalize the industry; they can ensure it's a thriving, sustainable industry; and they can provide all of the apples that we need in Ontario in-house, creating those jobs and creating the ripple effect to the economy, the positive economic impact, the direct and indirect jobs and the opportunity to ensure that this industry thrives. We now have cideries; it's a healthy food source. Yet I see nothing in the budget about that program.

Eight years ago, apple trees were being taken out of production in Ontario. Today our apple crop generates \$60 million in farmgate revenue, and there's lots of potential, we hear from the industry. The government is proud to say, "We're going to support this and we're going to support"—we just heard one of the ministers talk about supporting the car industry. Why will they not commit to the agricultural industry?

They often say that it's a priority ministry. Every other province—I believe every other province in Canada—has actually done an apple revitalization program, except Ontario. Why will we not watch and see the benefit that they're getting and do it here? I'm truly disappointed that the Minister of Agriculture did not facilitate the development of such a plan and champion Ontario's apple industry.

Instead, this government, which purports agriculture to be a priority, and that that's—in fact, the Premier at one time took this as part of her own personal portfolio. Yet they cut \$28 million from the agriculture and food budget and they increased costs across the agricultural community exponentially. This means less for farm families, less for rural communities, but more importantly, less for our province. Our food source is absolutely critical.

There was almost no mention of agriculture, other than a couple of niceties, but there was nothing there action-wise that actually gave our farmers hope. Many of the people in the meeting that I was at in Elmwood on Saturday morning—there were a lot of municipal politicians and commodity groups. You could see that they all felt the same: This is not a priority of this government, or you would not see—they had no hope that they were going to move forward.

When I was critic of community and social services, this Liberal government magically found \$50 million to cover overtime costs of a flawed SAMS program, and yet they cut \$28 million from agriculture, a supposed priority budget item for them.

We heard concerns at the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture meeting. Farmers are concerned about government rolling out policies without seeking proper scientific evidence, specifically the neonics and the pollinator health, and not consulting with industry stakeholders.

Rising electricity rates: They've added \$1,000 per year to the average family. Food producers need an agricultural and food electricity rate; greenhouses need industrial rates; and they have to stop the increasing regulatory burden.

Seniors in long-term care, which is close to my heart—that's what I'm currently critic of: I was pleased to see some money in there for palliative care. I was pleased to see some money for dementia and behavioural supports. On the other hand, I was very concerned about the impact overall to most of our seniors. Many of our seniors live on fixed incomes and in medically underserved rural areas. Instead of ensuring seniors have better access to care and affordable medical drugs, this government is nearly doubling the cost of their prescriptions. Seniors will have to pay substantially more for their prescriptions. The deductible for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program for seniors goes up from its current level of \$100 to \$170. This reduced access to drugs will contribute to poor health over time and cause potentially much higher cost.

We hear from individuals saying, "I can't afford this. I'm making a choice. I'm not going to take my drugs or all of my drugs." Then they end up in the emergency department, which is the absolute most costly form of health care in our province. I just can't understand the rationale that they used here. It's, again, more of that spin, where they want to make it look good—"We're doing this"—but what they don't tell you is what they're taking out of the other pocket.

There's a crisis in long-term care in every corner of Ontario: 24,000 seniors currently sit on a wait-list for a nursing bed, a wait-list that we have been told by the industry will double to 50,000 seniors in just six years. The Ontario Long Term Care Association: I've met with them and I've been briefed by them. I want to understand the industry so we can try to be as supportive as we can. We have aging, crumbling long-term-care homes and 30,000 outdated nursing beds that need to be rebuilt to

safe, modern standards. I have been pressing the minister and the associate minister since I took on this portfolio to ask them—to just give me the answers. You committed, in two elections back to back—perhaps a third—that you're going to refurbish and redevelop 30,000 beds. I've asked them a simple question: Can you show me the plan of when and where those beds were planned to be developed? The silence is deafening—a total disrespect and disregard for seniors in our province. How could anyone on that side of the House stand there with any sense of pride and say that we have promised and committed to 30,000 beds and yet you cannot produce something as simple as the plan of when and where you're going to do them? Seniors' care is under threat of being rationed by this Liberal government, just as was done with cuts to physiotherapy services for seniors—again, they take away the services and they end up falling, getting more injured and they're back into a much longer, much more tenuous and much more expensive form of care.

1540

We are calling on the government to halt the drug cost increases. The Premier stood up and said that they may need to review that; that they may not have done the right thing. We implore them to actually reverse their decision that they put into this budget.

Safe staffing levels have been brought up by the Ontario Long Term Care Association and the Ontario Association of Not-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. Both have called for safer staffing levels of care for the clinically complex seniors coming into long-term care homes. They're telling us that there are more complex needs, there are more challenges within the sector, and yet nothing is in there for increased staffing levels.

As many as 92% of Ontarians surveyed said that long-term care homes are not being staffed to meet the diverse and increasingly acute medical and mental care needs of our seniors. All they had to do was listen to the industry and to the stakeholders, and they could have made better decisions.

In my riding, I have a 100-year-old whom I went out and visited a few months ago. She was cut from three hours of care to two hours of care. I'm not certain who in this world can envision a 100-year-old needing less care as they get older, as opposed to more, with no rationale. Again, it's those types of things that I just can't fathom, and yet we see where some of the other money is wasted on things that actually are not front-line care and services.

There was no reference in the budget—and I would be remiss if I didn't ask the government—about the Markdale Hospital. They committed 10, 12, 14 years ago; they recommitted two years ago. It's not in the budget. I had a lot of calls saying, "Why isn't it in there?" There were a few other hospitals mentioned, so I'm going to put faith in this government. They committed, face to face, with the people in Markdale, and said, "We will build that hospital." I'm told by the executive of the hospital administration that it's moving forward, and I'm going to

hold them every day until I see the shovel in the ground and the first patient wheeled through the doors.

Compared to the last budget that saw another year of frozen hospital budgets, there were some increases, and that's good. But what they're doing is they're putting a bit of money in—\$107 million; that's a fairly significant amount—but what never gets talked about are those increasing energy and payroll costs. In Sault Ste. Marie, one of the hospitals there actually gave us figures that show that they're going to have a 25% increase in those two factors. So getting a little bit of funding—after a five-year freeze, by the way—not all is going to be good.

There was \$10 million per year for dementia support and money for palliative care, which, again, I have applauded the government for, and I'm glad to see, at least, a step in the right direction.

Sadly, the government cut \$815 million to physician services, which is further preventing patients from receiving the care that they deserve. Like anything—I'm a recreation director from way back. I believe that you keep people healthy. You're proactive and you ensure they stay in good health. You don't always go the opposite way and try to fix them in the most costly form after they get ill or sick. Again, it's challenging that I do not see that.

South Bruce Peninsula is identified as an area of high physician need, and yet the minister removed that designation just recently.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, we asked for three things in this budget: We wanted to see that they were addressing debt; we wanted to see that they were addressing front-line health care services; and we wanted to see that they're addressing the hydro cost. In fact, 85% of Ontarians told them, "Do not sell Hydro One." There's a \$750-million revenue there that is going to be gone in perpetuity. Where does that come from, Mr. Speaker? What does that fund?

I'm going to close with one other one. We've talked a lot and we've heard a lot in the last week and a half about free tuition. The Premier said she has some explaining to do, as it's not really free. Our leader, Patrick Brown, asked this morning for a definition. We want to know: What is your definition of "free" in clear black and white? "Free" is not just a buzzword at the top of a newspaper heading; "free" should actually mean totally free, which is what they tried to suggest to people.

We need to ensure that there's job creation. We need to ensure that money is going to the front line for health care; reducing our debt so we can actually fund more front-line care and services for the great people of this province; and we need to see a government in this budget that was actually thinking of Ontarians, not themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for questions and comments, I have to revert back to an unparliamentary remark that was made in the previous round of questions and comments. I would ask the member for Nipissing to withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I withdraw, Speaker.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I must have missed the comment. Could he repeat it so I know what he just withdrew?

Mr. Bob Delaney: You can always try a few of your favourite words and see if we object.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you.

It's always a pleasure to follow my good friend from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. My late father used to say that when somebody can speak that fast, he must have been inoculated with a gramophone needle, because he just keeps going and going.

He did say a couple of good things about the budget, and I think that's a good thing because there are a few things in the budget that grabbed the headlines and are worth acknowledging.

I think it's worthwhile to acknowledge that some seniors will get the shingles vaccine without payment. I think that's good. I think some of the lowest-income seniors are going to get prescription drugs without cost, and I think that's good. But those are the headlines. It's like the free tuition. That's the headline, but upon reflection, it isn't free and the vast majority of seniors in Ontario are going to have to pay almost double for the cost of their prescription drugs.

We can acknowledge that there are a few steps in the right direction in the budget, as the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound said, but there are a lot of steps backwards, and that's what we have to take into account.

One step that really bothers me, I guess, is the continued determination by the Liberal government to continue to sell our public shares in Ontario Hydro. Ontario Hydro is a public asset. It should be held in the public trust. It should always be there to benefit our children and our grandchildren, and it should never be sold to private, for-profit interests. Unfortunately, the Liberals continue to head in that direction, and that is not something to be proud of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for York South-Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me.

Well, it seemed like *Apocalypse Now* was coming down when I heard the member speaking. I just want to reassure him, especially from a fiscal responsibility point of view, that our government is committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18. We are projecting a lower deficit, a deficit of \$7.5 billion. We're on track to eliminate the deficit. Year after year, we have beaten our targets, and we are on track to do that.

I just wanted to reassure him also that we are planning to help businesses and small businesses in our province grow. That's very important. Every industry, every producer, is important to our economy. That's why we have announced a new Business Growth Initiative to respond to the challenges that businesses have and to help them with opportunities, trying to lower their business costs and helping small businesses grow in a global leadership role, if that's possible.

If they are in the food industry, that's even better. We have been talking so much lately here at Queen's Park about French's ketchup. That's one example of how we can help to boost our own companies.

We also want to help to commercialize our products and made-in-Ontario technologies, and help to reduce the regulatory burdens that businesses have. The priority of this government is to help our economy grow. It's to help to create jobs. That's why we're investing so much in infrastructure. We want to make life easier for average Ontarians, and that's why we're investing in health care and in the things that matter the most to Ontarians.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to comment on the speech by the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

You know, I had a grandson born last July.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes, a grandson, number five. And guess what he got: \$22,000 in debt as soon as he was born. That's what he got, \$22,000 in debt, and that's gone up since I have been here. Twenty-two thousand dollars and it just keeps going up.

The member also spoke about agriculture. I come from an agricultural community in Perth-Wellington. Twenty-eight million dollars was cut from the agricultural budget—\$28 million. You know, farmers have to live with the weather they get. They have to fight disease, they have to fight insects, and now they have to fight this government. It just gets to be unbearable at times.

1550

The government depends on the hard-work ethic that farmers have. They plant their crops every year, they hope they get a good harvest out of it and they hope the prices are good. One thing that really is hard on them—it weighs on their minds—is what the government is going to do or not do to them. Certainly, that is something that I've seen for many years with this government.

Agriculture is, I think, the highest-grossing business we have in Ontario. It supports many businesses in the GTA—dairies, cookie-making industries—and yet the government pays little regard to it, because they know that farmers will continue on and work hard. And yet they cut their budget by \$28 million this year.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound brings a lot to this debate because he can speak so quickly. He can get it all in in a very short amount of time, as he always does. But he listed off a number of issues that make it hard for us to support the budget on this side of the House, and genuinely so.

For me, though, I always go back to the process. We took the time, we spent the money, we travelled around this province. We did so with what at the time I thought was earnest effort to do so, to listen to the people of this province. We made a commitment to those people in those budget consultations that we would actively listen

to them and then apply what they had said to this budget process. Of course, that didn't happen, and that's one of the biggest weaknesses, as far as we can see: that there is such a serious disconnect between what is contained in this budget and what we heard from the people outside of this place.

This morning, I was at the inaugural anti-racism summit for our university campuses. That's what they were basically pleading. They were pleading for the politicians in this place to actively listen to what's actually going on in the province of Ontario, from a racism perspective and a discrimination perspective, and then apply that knowledge through the lens of race. We tried to do the equivalent of that from a financial perspective throughout that process.

What you have here, then, is a flawed process. You have a flawed document that does not meet the needs of the people of this province. Regardless of some of the good things that we were fighting for that are contained within this budget, it makes it impossible for us to support it, and the people of this province understand that full well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound can now reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Both the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, a good friend of mine, and Kitchener–Waterloo talked about me talking fast. The reality is that I talk fast because, sadly, this government has created so many issues that there's lots to talk about, and I don't want to miss anything that's important to the people of Ontario.

The member from York South–Weston talked about the deficit. I just want to reiterate that they're going to get a \$1.8-billion transfer from the federal government, \$1.9 billion extra in personal income tax revenue, \$500 million in sales tax increases, \$700 million in corporate income tax revenue and an additional cap-and-trade revenue of \$500 million. The Financial Accountability Officer is projecting that they're going to have \$4 billion more in revenues. If they don't come up with that, look out for the taxes coming.

She talked about wanting businesses to grow and the priority. Well, their stats actually show that instead of their prediction of 93,000 jobs in 2016, they're now projecting 78,000, so 15,000 fewer jobs. I would attribute that to the increasing hydro costs, the ORPP and the taxes they're bringing in, the increased taxes on gasoline for operation and the red tape.

She talked about the food industry being a high priority of this government. I wish their hunger for the agricultural industry and the food that farmers actually produce was as significant as their hunger for power. Let's not forget they cut \$28 million from that supposed priority industry.

My colleague from Perth–Wellington, congratulations on his fifth grandson, but he brings a very, very important perspective to it: His new grandson was born into \$22,100 of debt. I heard one of the members opposite

saying, "It's not like we're asking you to pay today." No, but we're tired of you putting it onto our kids, our grandkids and our great-grandkids so that you can cling to power. You can't just keep spending like pirates. You have to put things in fiscal order.

As I said earlier, we spent \$12 billion on interest payments. That means that we actually aren't providing services and programs at the front lines of health care, education and for those most in need in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Applause.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd go easy on your clap; it might not be what you want to hear.

Speaker, basically, I'm well known as a guy that comes from the hip, and this is probably—a lot of the people I represent feel this way. I'm going to speak for myself as well as the people I represent—the majority of them, at least.

I'd like to cut right to the chase: This budget has the wrong priorities and does little or nothing to help the vast majority of Ontarians. In fact, it actively makes life harder for hundreds of thousands of them. This should be called the "no jobs today, probably none tomorrow act."

Good, stable jobs are disappearing, especially in my community. People feel worried about their own future and about their children's future. They work harder; they often commute longer; they try to manage higher accommodation costs and higher debts than ever before; and they spend less and less time enjoying their friends and family. Education, health care, home care and long-term care are in a mess. The costs of electricity and housing are rising relentlessly. And thanks to the equally relentless rise in precarious employment, a vast number of people find themselves without dental or medical benefits, without a pension plan or even without paid sick days. Speaker, the pension plan crisis in Hamilton is brutal, and this budget, like many that came before it, has done little or nothing to fix that.

Very little has changed under the current Premier, other than the name on the door. The Liberal boondoggles and scandals continue; they may even be ramping up, I'm afraid.

The catastrophic mismanagement of the energy file, which has inflicted misery on Ontarians and driven industry out of the province, has only accelerated with a sell-off of Hydro One. This government lacked the competence to fix Hydro One so that it could deliver affordable, secure and green power for all Ontarians. Instead, it's selling off Hydro One to private investors, washing its hands of the problem and removing any lines of accountability. Instead of doing their job and listening to the public and fixing public power, the Liberals listened to Bay Street yet again, and yet again they put private profits ahead of the public interest.

This government continues to make a virtue of having one of the lowest combined corporate tax rates in North America, even lower than Alabama. Its corporate friends are kept happy, healthy, wealthy and wise, while schools and hospitals and the rest of us are underfunded.

For the seventh straight year, hospital funding will not keep up with the rate of inflation—not even the rate of inflation. We see the results of this all over our province. Outrageously, First Nations communities in northern Ontario were forced to declare a state of emergency in February because the health needs of the indigenous people are still not being met by the provincial and federal governments. This is a disgrace. It's terrible. This is Canada. There was a state of emergency in 2016, not because of a natural disaster or an accident, but because of sheer systematic neglect.

Liberal cuts to health care are hurting patients in my hometown of Hamilton. Hamilton Health Sciences is cutting nearly 100 full-time positions at St. Joe's. It's cutting 136 positions at the—mental health services are being moved out of my riding and out of east Hamilton. Those services are a lifeline for people in need, but now the whole east side of Hamilton will be without psychiatric care. Patients will be asked to take the bus for an extra hour each way to the remaining facility on Hamilton Mountain. These additional burdens of time and money will only discourage patients from getting the help they need. RNs, RPNs, social workers, child care workers, technologists, lab staff and many other workers are all threatened by cuts at St. Joseph's, and they know the impact this will have on their community and their friends. The closure of this east region mental health service is a body blow to my riding, which is the second poorest in Ontario. Poverty breeds poor health, including mental health. This clinic exists to provide community-based support. Instead, we're asking people to travel an hour each way out of their community to get help.

This pattern of short-term cuts with long-term costs and consequences is the hallmark of this Liberal government, and it's occurring across our province in many places. This budget does nothing—I repeat, nothing—to address the great structural problem facing our health care system, which is that the proportion of seniors continues to grow and our health care system is just not funded, equipped or designed to deal with their health care needs. This government just keeps on passing the buck to the next generation and the next government, or hopes that helicopter drops of money from its federal friends will save it from the consequences of its actions, from its lack of vision and from its inability to get its priorities straight.

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I know that many of my colleagues on the other side of the House have honourable intentions. One might question, however, to where the road they're paving leads. If recent newspaper reports are correct, then the Premier has been obliging her ministers to spend as much time as possible balancing the Liberal Party books instead of managing their own portfolios and attempting to reduce their deficit in socially responsible ways.

There was a cartoon in the *Toronto Star* the other week that showed the Premier turning Girl Guides away from her office with a sign reading, "\$6,000 For Access." It was one of those cartoons where you laugh at first and

then you want to cry. I did a quick calculation. Since the province's debt is about to pass \$300 billion—and we are all greatly indebted to the Liberal government for that—then if the Premier was indeed to remove the key card reader at her office door and replace it with a credit card reader, and if she were so generous as to redirect those admission fees to the public purse, then she would need 50 million visitors at her office to pay off that debt. Every Ontarian over the age of nine would need to troop through her door, credit card in hand, four times. Although at the rate this government is going, they'd be drafting seven-year-olds and eight-year-olds in time for next year's budget.

There are times, even so briefly, where I feel optimism, or at least a little hope. I had that feeling heading into this budget, especially after attending the pre-budget consultations in Hamilton. The speakers were very passionate and so dedicated to exposing injustice and explicitly laying out their community needs that I thought this government would not fail to hear their call and pay them some heed in this budget. But, Speaker, once again the Liberal members of that committee never even had a chance to report back to the cabinet to influence the budget, for this budget was already written, concocted in a smoke-filled room over the holidays, no doubt, with no input from the public. The public interest was not the government's interest, and this is a terrible thing to say in a democracy—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Are we done over there?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the government members to please come to order. I'm trying to hear the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who has the floor.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker.

This government's interest and the public interest have grown so far apart in this province, and we know that by the fact that the government rushed this budget out before they even had a chance to hear the public interest. They would, or should, be ashamed to introduce a budget that was so contrary to the wishes expressed by the people of this province, and they found it easiest to act before the public's views ever reached their desks. One wonders how often the Premier and her ministers meet real members of the public, because if they did and had an opportunity to hear what my constituents and all our constituents are constantly crying out for, then how could they, in good conscience, act so contrary to their pleas time and time again?

As one example, what do we as MPPs hear over and over again from our constituents and our municipalities? We hear the desperate need for affordable housing in this province. We hear that not only is there a terrible shortage but that the units already in place are deteriorating to the point of no repair because they have shaved off the maintenance funding for the last 20 years. What was the budget's response to the overwhelming demand? The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing saw a \$20-million cut. A great response. Sometimes it feels like this

government reads the pre-budget consultation report only in order to do the exact opposite to what the people want.

Now I will concede that the government is finally showing movement on the topic of inclusionary zoning, which my colleague from Parkdale–High Park has been demanding for years, but there's not a penny of extra money to build new housing or repair our existing stock of public housing—not a penny anywhere. Some of these units are actually uninhabitable due to decades of neglect, and there's no money to turn them into livable homes for the hundreds of thousands of people crying out for an affordable roof over their heads. CityHousing Hamilton can only afford to spend less than half of its annual spending need to maintain its properties.

I see nothing to protect the steel industry in this province in this budget—nothing. They're talking a good game. The minister and the other minister and the Premier are talking to their friends in Ottawa, but while that's going on, the steelworkers in Hamilton are losing their jobs, they've lost their benefits, and who knows when US Steel is going to attack their pensions? It's absolutely deplorable.

This is a blueprint of what's going to happen to other companies in this country, in our province. It's a corporate agenda that's been going on for 15 to 20 years. I can remember fighting this 20 years ago in Ottawa. I can tell you right now, Speaker, this is just the start of it. When they start attacking the public sector, you're going to see some real outcries.

This government needs to be calling in favours with the federal government that they say is so great and their fellow people-in-arms—the same party. Well, if that's the case, you've got a majority government in Ottawa. They should be loosening up the purse strings for Ontario, giving more money back to this province in the proportion of the amount of people we have. The members over there, including the member from St. Catharines, have always fought for fair funding from Ottawa. Well, folks, here's your chance. You've got a majority government in Ottawa. Get them to open their purse strings and send some money to Ontario to help us with all these needs of the province, plus your infrastructure costs, plus all the other debts that you're racking up. There's lots of money in Ottawa. Maybe they should start sending it to where it should have been going a long time ago, and that's Ontario.

Stelco retirees whose medical benefits have been stripped by US Steel and whose pensions are now threatened are in a state of frenzy. They need help from both the provincial and federal governments—both governments—not just passing the buck between each other, blaming the feds, the feds blaming the province. You're both Liberal governments; you should do something to help these people.

Let me give you an example of a blatant disconnect between the public and what they're calling for. Seniors—well, not only seniors—have been asking for years for better health and long-term-care coverage. There are so many holes in this system that are only

being patched over by banknotes from people's pockets. One of my constituents contacted my office for help regarding one of these holes in health care. His wife had suffered a stroke and was taken to Hamilton General Hospital by ambulance. By definition, this would be described as a medically necessary use of an ambulance.

While dealing with this deeply traumatic event, an invoice arrived in the mail for a co-payment towards the ambulance ride. In this province, under this government, medically necessary isn't enough to have your ambulance costs covered either. You've got to pay for the ambulance. Some of these people can't even afford to put the lights on. We pride ourselves on being a province and country where you don't have to worry about the cost of health care and where you don't have to worry about your bills, but we all know that isn't true. How awful for a husband facing this terrible situation to have a bill for an ambulance land on his doorstep when he's going through that traumatic experience.

I hear many stories like this every week in my office of mean and burdensome little payments in this system that aren't covered by OHIP and come right out of their pockets. Did the government do anything for people like him? I don't think so.

Instead of reducing the burden on seniors by removing these mean changes, it increased the annual deductible on drug payments by 70%. Seniors earning more than \$19,500 a year will have to cough up 70% more for prescription drugs. Why is this? It's because the Premier calls them affluent seniors. The Premier, who's living on a six-figure budget, calls seniors earning less than \$20,000 affluent. The Premier—presiding over a record sunshine list, handing out six-figure contracts, salaries, bonuses and severance payments to Liberals left, right and centre—is so out of touch, so utterly oblivious to reality, that she called low-income seniors affluent. I challenge any member on that side or any member in this House to live on \$20,000 a year. Good luck.

Speaker, \$20,000 a year is not affluent. What exactly would they call Saäd Rafi and the other Pan Am executives with their buyouts? If you compare it to what he got for a buyout, that would be good for about 20 years for a person making \$20,000. You can take 20 years of making \$20,000 with not even having to get up and go to work thanks to the payouts they give these guys. How would they describe the new CEO of Hydro One and his \$4-million annual income? I'd call that super-affluent. I'd call that ridiculous, on the senior side of affluent, affluent today and more affluent tomorrow.

Let me spell out the truth in language this government would recognize. The Liberal government has broadened the affluence of a select few, and a select few only. This government has been reading George Orwell all too closely in its effort to redefine language and has missed the real point entirely. Privatization is “broadening of ownership.” Precarious work is “contemporary mobile employment.” Low-paying, insecure, temporary or contract and possibly part-time work is “contemporary.” Living from paycheque to paycheque, falling behind in

your rent and not being able to afford food is the bright new future in Liberal Ontario.

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Contemporary employment—get used to it. When they describe it like that, you realize that they're not going to go do a thing about it, and they can't. They've accepted it as a fact, as the structure of the modern economy rather than an ugly injustice that needs to be rectified and redefined. "It's the way things are," they tell us. "It's just the way it is, and you'd better get used to it because it's 2016."

We certainly know that good job creation is out of fashion with this government, because they keep revising their employment targets lower and lower and then missing even their own lowered expectations. It's pretty bad when you miss your own lower expectations. This budget missed its targets on job creation. This budget missed the government's targets on GDP growth, on employment growth and on business investment.

One of the first things they did in this year's budget was to admit they're not going to reach the jobs target they set for themselves in last year's budget. Last year, they actually downgraded their jobs prediction by 65,000 jobs. Year after year, this government talks a great game about job creation. We'll see more and more people in precarious work.

While we see good manufacturing jobs leaving this province, and while we see entire communities in the highest figures when it comes to unemployment rates in the country over and over again, yet in this budget the Liberals are pulling back their estimate of how many jobs they will be able to support or create in 2016-17. It offers no hope for struggling families. It offers no hope for young people who are trying to get a start in life. Children are still going to bed hungry in this province. I have 6,000 kids in my area who are going to school without the proper nutrition. That's terrible. One of the biggest cities in Ontario: 6,000 kids. How many schoolrooms will that fill?

This government's performance has been miserable. They don't even bother to set targets for homelessness and poverty reduction anymore. Their goals are aspirational. Past performance is one of the best guides to future performance, and even the government itself is dimly aware of the history of these failures. By removing goals and targets, it has redefined success and failure for itself, but only for itself—only for its own little bubble.

We on the side of this House are not fooled, nor are the millions of Ontarians outside facing higher costs and worse jobs, looking at 13 years of tired, out-of-touch, underperforming government that has seriously lost its way.

One fine example, Speaker—and this is from Hamilton. I had the privilege of sitting on the committee in Hamilton listening to the pre-budget presentations. I heard many sad stories and many wonderful constructive recommendations. We heard about the government's failure to adequately protect correctional officers, but the most disgraceful fact was that we learned that there is an

equivalent—as I said before—of 270 classrooms of children who use food banks in Hamilton. That is an embarrassing, sobering, serious statistic that should leave us all in this Legislature ashamed, because in 2016 we have the solutions for child poverty, but in Liberal Ontario there are thousands upon thousands of classrooms worth of children who depend on food banks. If this government was to live up to its ideals, this would be one of the first places it would start. It would be one of the priorities of this budget, but it isn't.

Speaker, I cannot support this budget. It does not reflect the voices or priorities of the people of this province or the people I represent. It was designed without public input or consultation by a government that thumbed its nose at this Legislature and wasted the time of all kinds of citizen panels who sought to speak to this budget process. It has missed its opportunity. The NDP and I will not be supporting it, and the people of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek can very much understand why.

Speaker, in my closing minute I would just like to put a little bit of reality into this place. I've sat here for years and I've seen the waste. This government, with all due respect, has had more scandals in the last six years than entire governments of this country in the last 100. That's unbelievable. That's unbelievable, and we're not done yet. We're not done yet; there's more coming.

What I'm saying to you, Speaker, is this: Once this government gets its priorities straight and starts taking care of the pensioners, starts taking care of hospitalization for the people and seniors, starts taking care of the people—instead of working from the top down, Speaker, maybe they should work from the bottom up. The first thing that gets hit when there's a recession or there's a lack of budgetary monetary needs are the social programs at the bottom: the schools, the ODSP, the OW. They start hammering the bottom. Yet for some strange reason, the banks, the insurance companies and everyone else are announcing record profits. What's wrong with that picture, Speaker? What's wrong with that picture? Are the banks, or the insurance companies, not satisfied with a 50% increase? No.

A woman comes into my office, toting three kids, with no place to live. She can't feed her kids. But that's okay, because the banker is driving a Mercedes and he made whatever—\$5 million.

I'm telling you, this country has got to wake up, because it's happening in the States too.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I hope I didn't sound that negative when I was in opposition. Surely not.

Mr. Paul Miller: You probably did.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I probably did. I have to agree with the member. I probably did.

There were so many good things in the budget, and the government members will talk about those. I know there are things that the opposition disagrees with, so this is part of the process, and I certainly accept that.

I was surprised that the member brought up the issue of access and so on, because he mentioned fundraising that took place. It reminded me, Mr. Speaker—because he mentioned Liberal fundraising—that there was a dinner held at the Royal York in Toronto—you will recall reading about this—where people had to pay \$10,000 a shot to have access to the NDP and the NDP leader. Now, not only that, but they brought in Rachel Notley, the new Premier of Alberta, which, of course, then would attract the oil barons from the west who had offices in Ontario to come to a gathering of this kind. So just as my good friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek talked about me not throwing stones in a glass house, I want to remind him of that, when he raised that particular issue. And \$10,000: Wow, that's a big figure. I can remember when the NDP didn't take corporate donations. Boy, things have changed.

The other thing that I want to mention—there are a lot of things that are proposed by the opposition. One of my thoughts that has come forward from everybody who's proposing things is that nobody wants to talk about tax increases—of course, corporate tax increases, which would bring in a minimal amount of money—but if you're going to make significant changes that incur a lot more costs, there's going to have to be an increase in taxes. Everybody wants more, but the opposition is not going to raise its taxes except in one specific small area.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech from the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

He did bring up the fact that the government just didn't listen to the pre-budget consultations. That's because, as was pointed out by the member from Nipissing, they had already written the budget. It went for translation on January 27. That's when it went to translation, so it was written before that.

The SCFEA committee—the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—was having its meetings. It travelled around and flew around the province from the 18th to the 22nd of January. It was in Hamilton; it was in Windsor; it was in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Ottawa. Then on February 1 and 2, it met here in Toronto.

Little did they know that what they were doing was just all a sham. It was all for show. It was all about making it look like the government was listening, and making it look like the government cared.

All these people, the 146 different delegations that came before the committee, thinking that the government was listening—I mean, this is just not right. They all took time and they took effort to put their thoughts together—and to travel, in many cases, in northern Ontario—so they could be heard. They would naturally assume that they were going to be heard, but it was just all for show, and so much that is the case with this government.

I think that is absolutely terrible. What can you believe from a government that just goes through the motions of

listening and has no intention whatsoever of listening to what the people have to say? It certainly didn't listen to seniors, when we see their drug costs going up, for most seniors, by 70%. And they certainly didn't listen to the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, a government that just isn't listening: That's what we have today.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek was talking about what we heard in Hamilton. Those were painful delegations to hear, because these people were desperate. These were parents who were concerned about their children. These were parents and members of the community who knew that the lack of a comprehensive housing strategy left kids moving from school to school to school and compromising their success.

It's interesting to hear the minister without portfolio come back at this member for what he said by saying, "Oh, well, we have to talk about taxes." Why is it okay to continue to download the mismanagement of this government to everyday Ontarians, to the citizens of this province, but not okay to have an honest discourse on the corporate tax rate, which for the province of Ontario is lower than for the state of Alabama? Why is it not okay to have that conversation?

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And when this minister says, "Oh, it's just a minimum," maybe that's the problem. Maybe the fact that this member and this government think that \$1 billion that could be raised with a modest increase in corporate tax is a minimum of money—maybe that's the complete and utter disconnect of this government, that they think \$1 billion is nothing.

The process was flawed. I think this government has basically just revealed to the people of this province that they are not interested in listening to the people. They have their own agenda; it is the Liberal agenda, and they are moving forward with it. Quite honestly, a majority does not mean you get to undermine the democracy. That does not happen in the province of Ontario, and that's what happened. Both the finance critics filed a dissenting report for that budget, and there was quite a kerfuffle, Speaker, because it has never happened before that critics have filed a dissenting report on a budget that has already been delivered in advance of the committee report.

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: Before I get started and talk about the many things there are to celebrate in the budget, I also wanted to highlight something that my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans reminded me of just now, qu'hier a été la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. I know those of us who are francophone celebrate, but I think all Ontarians can celebrate this important day where we celebrate French language and culture around the world.

I would like to highlight a few things about the budget that I think are worth celebrating in my two minutes. I

won't get through them all, but there's a few things that I have heard from my constituents in Etobicoke Centre that I think are particularly important and are going to change and improve the lives of Ontarians.

An area that I'm particularly passionate about, because I represent a community where we have quite a number of seniors in the riding, is that of health care. I know the opposition talks a lot about cuts to health care. I don't know how they have done their math, but when I look at page 282 of the budget, I see \$1 billion more for health care and I see a 1% increase in hospital-based funding for operating expenditures. That's \$345 million. I see increases in funding for community care, something that's incredibly important to my community, where so many seniors have talked to me about that, but also families who are caring for their aging parents have talked to me about that. There are investments in cancer care, in home care. These are all really important investments that will improve the quality of life of people in my community.

Another thing that's important, of course, and that we've talked a lot about is the change to the Ontario Tuition Grant, something that will provide greater access to post-secondary education for our young people. I know our Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has been working on this very, very hard, and I congratulate him and our Premier on a wonderful initiative that will help our students access post-secondary and help them achieve an even greater potential in the years to come. I know that in the years to come we will look back on this as a transformational initiative that helped improve the quality of life of our young people.

Lastly, of course, I just want to highlight that we are on track to balance the budget, something that I'm proud to be part of. I know we will continue working towards getting value for taxpayers' dollars.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments. We return to the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his reply.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would just like to end this two minutes coming from the heart here. I listened to all these answers about the budget and how wonderful it is. Well, I would be pleased to invite the new member and the older member to take a tour with me of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and actually talk to the people that come into my office in droves about the problems they're facing in this economy, whether it be pensions or being cut off from their benefits. I have 85-year-old women phoning up in tears.

Then they're going to raise their health costs and all the things—that's great. I guess it's good if you live in affluent Toronto, but when you get outside of Toronto, there are people facing difficult times. I'm sure that some of the members over there that aren't from Toronto know that.

To sit here and listen to this—you know, I'm really disappointed. I respect the member from St. Catharines to the utmost, but for him to take what I said and turn it into "Well, you had a \$10,000 fundraiser"—listen, Speaker, if parties don't have fundraisers; if the opposition parties

can't raise money to fight a government, to have money to be able to defend their position and to be able to—we don't have the papers in our back pocket. We don't have Bay Street in our pocket. As the third party, we fight hard for the people, but we need money to have advertising. We're lucky if we get one television ad. They get 20 ads.

We need the money, Speaker, and I'm not going to stand here and listen to them throw stones about fundraising—it's ridiculous; all parties have to do it—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: —especially the member from Beaches–East York. He's the guy who owns the bar, and he wants to take their tips. That's okay. But the bottom line is—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay.

Mr. Paul Miller: I have 16 seconds, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please sit down.

Mr. Paul Miller: But my time is still going.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please sit down.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order, please. I'm going to give the member for Hamilton–East Stoney Creek a few seconds to sum up.

Mr. Paul Miller: I have two seconds? Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that extra time.

All I can say is, the proof is in the pudding. Come and talk to the people in my community, and I'll tell you, it would wipe off any arrogant smiles on that side of the House. Come and talk to the people.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure to rise in the House and stand before you today—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: You're coming to the budget?

Hon. Mario Sergio: —I'm coming to that, thank you; good advice—in support of the budget for 2016. Before I do that, I want to share my 20 minutes with the wonderful Minister of Education, the member from Guelph.

Thank you to the member across the street there.

Speaker, this is a budget that has been designed to grow our economy and create jobs. I agree with the Minister of Finance—he has been working very, very hard; he has been consulting extremely at length—that in Ontario, there is indeed room for everyone. There is room for everyone to compete and do business, and to grow; room to learn; and room to help each other as well. I also believe that this budget does just that. I share the Minister of Finance's belief that no matter which side of the House we are on, we should all agree that what Ontario needs is jobs for today and jobs for tomorrow.

However, that takes commitment and strategic investment, investment that this government is just doing. That is why I'm so proud to be part of a government led by Premier Kathleen Wynne, who believes in its people.

But our government is focused on building an Ontario that is every bit as compassionate and competitive. Before I go into some of the details of the budget, I want to make some comments on the budget being seen by the eyes of seniors, and especially my seniors.

Seniors have been talked about a lot in the House, not only today but in the last while. In answering some of the calls that I got this past Saturday—not this one here; the other one—I had two very wonderful calls from my area, from the Chalkfarm community.

I answered the call, and I was given the name of Maria. So I give her a call, and Maria gets on the phone. She's excited that I called her back, and she says, "Now, you tell me, Mario, why I have to pay an extra \$170 for the medicine, for the drugs."

I said, "You don't have to."

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"Yes, I heard people said it in the House."

"You don't have to. Sometimes, especially when we debate the budget, there may be some disagreement, but it is not so. If you have a minute, I'll tell you what's in the budget for you and for other seniors."

"You can tell me. Take all the time you want because I'm not going anywhere. I'm in a wheelchair."

"Okay, that's fine." So I start to tell Maria what's in the budget for her and for other seniors like her in the province of Ontario. Speaker, I have to say that when I was finished with Maria, not only was she happy, she was smiling, because I took the time to explain to her what's in this budget, let alone in past budgets.

She said, "How come we don't know about those benefits?"

"Well, you know, you're watching TV."

"Yes, I watch TV every day."

"But unfortunately, we cannot say everything while you're watching TV." I said, "Have you heard anything else about what's in the budget?"

"No, only that I'm upset that I keep on hearing there's \$170 and \$170. It certainly bothers me because I just make above \$19,100."

"Okay, Maria, since you have some time, let me tell you what's in the budget for you as well as other seniors. First of all, home care is important; community care is important. We have added an extra \$250 million so indeed seniors like you can receive more care at home."

"Oh, that's good," she said.

"About that: You're saving another \$170 because you don't have to pay for the shingles vaccine."

"Oh, I didn't know that. Okay."

"You know that we are investing another \$75 million over the next three years in community-based residential hospice and palliative care. Maria, lots of seniors go in those particular places."

"Indeed."

"We're also investing another \$10 million annually in Behavioural Supports Ontario. That is for initiatives to help residents with dementia." When I said "dementia," she said, "Don't tell me about it. I already know about that."

"Well, that's wonderful"—another complex behavioural and neurological condition. I said, "By the way, Maria, you know that if you have to go into the hospital or someone is going to take you into a hospital, now we have cut down the rates for parking by 50%."

"Oh, really?"

"Really. By the way, for the medicine—for this \$170 you told me about—people like you, in your income bracket, some 173,000 Ontarians don't pay any more than the first \$100."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, Maria."

She said, "Is there anything else?"

I said, "Yes, indeed. As well, we are saving you \$70 because we are removing the debt retirement charge." By this time, Speaker, I can tell that Maria—through the phone, if you will—is smiling. She's not only happy, but she's smiling.

I said, "Maria, by the way, since I have you on the phone, you know there are some other benefits on top of this that you already should be receiving."

She said, "What other benefits?"

"If you qualify, you're entitled to receive another \$500 from the Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant."

"I never got this."

"No. You have to declare it when you do your income tax." She was smiling. I said, "If you qualify, Maria, you're entitled to another \$1,131 from the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit."

Mr. Arthur Potts: Wow. Maria's happy.

Hon. Mario Sergio: She was not happy, but she was smiling. She was smiling.

Also, I said, "One more thing: We threw in another \$287 on the Ontario Sales Tax Credit." She was happy, I have to tell you.

But the most interesting call was the second person I called. She said, "I know what you guys are saying. I know the size of the House and I know why you're saying that, but it's not fair because you're not being honest with us, especially with our seniors."

I said, "How is that?"

"You're confusing us because you say one thing. We hear the other side and they say something else. Then we hear the opposition say something else."

I said, "This is the debate in the House." But she said, "It's not fair. If you can't say the truth in the House, you should resign." I said, "Maria"—the other lady was another Maria—"unfortunately, that is not the way it works." But she said, "You know something, Mario"—we are on a first-name basis. I said, "Look, in the House, unfortunately, we say things that, yes, we shouldn't say," but the point was made.

To go into a little bit more detail—I know I only have one and a half minutes left, so I don't want to go into the other details. But let me say that the budget itself is about jobs and the economy. It's one of the most important points that our Premier, since she took office, has been pounding on, putting out money for infrastructure to

create jobs for the people of Ontario. When I'm in my riding, I don't hear any complaints. The only thing that people tell me—they say, “Look, if you want to increase taxes a bit, that's okay, as long as my son, my daughter and I have a job, as long as we work.” I think that's the important thing that sometimes we forget: that as long as people are working, they can go shopping, they can spend money, and they don't mind if they have to pay an extra buck. But they want to see a government that is responsive to their needs, to deliver the care that they need when they need it. They want to make sure that we provide for a good education—and I'm sure that the minister will talk about that.

I want to dwell a bit longer on seniors, because seniors have been talked about quite a bit in the last while. I think, especially our seniors, we must take them very seriously. We must respect them, because they are the people who deserve all of our attention, on both sides of the House. We should be fair. They should be treated fairly, because they demand it. They are everything for us.

Interjection: They helped build this province.

Hon. Mario Sergio: They helped build this province, of course, but above all, they need our respect. I will have more to say about the benefits that are in the budget for seniors, but I'm very grateful that at least I put that on the record and let you know how some of my seniors in my riding feel. It's the same, wherever I'm travelling in Ontario: All seniors want the same respect. It doesn't matter where they live.

Speaker, I'll defer to my colleague the member for Guelph. I thank you for your time and I thank the members for their attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph and Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to my colleague the minister responsible for seniors for speaking about seniors. I wanted to speak a little bit about various educational issues. I'm going to start off with my own ministry.

One of the things that we've talked a lot about, and that there has been a lot of public interest in over the last little while, has been the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In fact, they had said that we need to teach all students about the history of residential schools, the history of treaties and the history of our First Nations people in Canada. Most of the viewers probably don't realize this, but that's material that we already introduced into the Ontario curriculum a few years ago. But, in many instances, it's optional curriculum; it would be one example in several. So at the moment, we're going through making sure that all those things that the TRC recommended as mandatory parts of the curriculum will become mandatory in the Ontario curriculum.

The next problem that we face is that, for many of our teachers, it wasn't mandatory learning when they took history, when they took geography, when they took social sciences. So, in the budget this year, we actually

have \$15 million over the next three years precisely to develop resources for the teachers that line up with the new curriculum, to provide professional development for the teachers in the new curriculum so that we can really effectively meet those recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I'm very excited that we were able to do this in this year's budget.

I'm the member for Guelph, and of course, Guelph is a university town. So something else that I think a lot about is university students. When we look at the data, what we see is that students from high-income families are way more likely to go to post-secondary education than students from low-income families. Now, if you look at the data, it is true that the participation rate in Ontario in post-secondary education is higher than in the rest of Canada, and that's actually true at every income level. In Ontario, it's already true that low-income students are more likely to attend than in other parts of Canada. Nevertheless, they're lagging behind, and we don't think that family income should be a barrier to a student who's qualified to go to post-secondary education.

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What we've done in this year's budget is we have totally revamped the student aid program for post-secondary. I want to congratulate my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for doing an amazing job of really transforming tuition grants in Ontario. I want to start a bit about the way it is right now.

Right now, there are three ways in which students might get assistance with the cost of going to college or university. First of all, there's a tax credit. The problem with tax credits through your income tax is that you get them way after the fact. You spend the money and then, sometime next year, you get the tax credit. You don't get it when you get the bill for the tuition; you get it eight, 10, 12 months later, after you've already had to spend the money. Then you get the credit.

The associations that represent university and college students have said that it's not really that great when you get it way after the fact. We have the Ontario Student Assistance Program, which is part grant, part loan, but for a lot of that, you don't actually find out till you're about to graduate that some of your loan is going to be converted to grant. It's very confusing. Students don't know up front how much is actually going to be grant.

Then there's the 30%-off tuition program for families under \$140,000, which has been quite successful, but it doesn't apply to everybody; it just applies to students in their first four years out of university. So if, in fact, you're a mature student who got laid off from the job you got out of high school, and the only way you're going to find a decent new job is to go back as a mature student, you don't qualify. If you're one of those students who didn't quite know what to do after university and you took a couple of years figuring it out, you don't qualify for all of that 30% off.

The student associations have actually come to us and said, “You're really trying hard to get lower-income people into university and college, but a lot of the programs you've got right now don't quite hit the target.”

What the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has done has totally revamped the program, taken all those three programs and rolled them up into some new programs. The really exciting thing now is that if you are a student who comes from a family with income under \$50,000, the grant you receive up front each year will pay for your tuition or more. So tuition will, in fact, be free for those students who attend college and university whose family income is under \$50,000.

What about those over \$50,000? And I think this is where it hasn't necessarily been clear. For families over \$50,000, there's actually a graduated grant-gear-to-income system. For people in the \$50,000-to-\$80,000 family income bracket, about half of those will qualify for totally free tuition. The rest will qualify for a partial grant, and that goes geared to income all the way out to families with \$160,000 in income. So in fact, there is a grant-gear-to-income system for all those students from families in the \$50,000-to-\$160,000 bracket, and of course there are still loans available as well. But what it does do is make sure that, while there's support for middle-income families, we make sure that the students from the lowest-income families will, in fact, have access to college and universities.

Now, because I'm the member from Guelph, I must mention something else. We had a very exciting event in Guelph, specifically at the Ontario Veterinary College, on Friday, where the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities was present. This is an infrastructure budget. We're spending \$160 billion on infrastructure over the next 12 years, and we announced that \$23 million of that infrastructure is going to the Ontario Veterinary College to build an addition and to do some significant renovations in the surgical and anaesthesia suites. I must tell you that that's \$23 million towards a \$33-million project and that people are very excited. As I wandered around over the weekend, I kept hearing from more people who were hearing about this and were very excited that the Ontario Veterinary College will be getting those additions and upgrades to its facilities.

I'm sure, as time unfolds, that we will learn more about the infrastructure investments. I know that one of the things that has been near and dear to people in the Guelph-Kitchener corridor is the four-laning of Highway 7. That's a capital project that will be proceeding.

Also, the upgrading of the GO service from Kitchener-Guelph: In this year's budget, the number of GO train trips will be doubling for those that are initiated in Kitchener, go through Guelph and stop in Acton in your riding, Speaker. The number of trips in the morning will be doubled, and the number of trips home in the evening will be doubled. That is in this year's budget, as well.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to offer my two cents on the debate from the government side. I just thought that I'd point out a few things that haven't been talked about in this budget or were completely ignored.

One is the emergency access process—EAP—for medication use. It used to be six weeks to get a renewal

done. I have a couple of patients back home who are on medication that needs special authorization. They've been on it for years. Usually, the doctor would send the paperwork in and, six weeks later, you'd get a response.

They are still looking at December's information. It's now three or four months of this process being bogged down. Basically, people are now having to pay for the medication because somehow, through this government's bureaucratic process, they've logjammed the system. Whether it's because they have no money to balance the budget and they're using this money to offset their costs or they're just incompetent, I'm not sure which way you go.

This budget also didn't touch on the fact that cancer treatment is moving to oral medication. This government still does not cover oral medications for cancer treatment. They're still using the older treatments—intravenous and injection—and having to utilize our hospital services more often, whereas the newer treatments are oral medications. The Ontario Drug Benefit Program has nothing to do with introducing oral medications. The Canadian Cancer Society sends us emails consistently on this issue, but that wasn't addressed in this budget.

Cutting the assistive devices programs: The disabled in our province are being hit hard because this government has been financially incompetent in delivering services. That's not talked about in this budget.

I only have five seconds. I could go on about the demonstration schools that are being cut in this province that aren't mentioned in this budget.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to make some remarks. I really enjoyed the presentation by the minister for seniors talking about Maria. I think we have a lot of Marias, some not as fortunate as others, some who don't fall into that narrow bracket on income levels and age.

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I was talking to a lady in my riding, and she was telling me about feeling that it's a one-two punch at seniors. She gets the uppercut from the private insurer because her husband needs a daily dose of aspirin for a heart condition and a private insurer that she deals with isn't covering that anymore. There's the uppercut, and then the right cross comes from you guys because you're going to double her prescription cost. So she's got to pay more for the private insurer now, for the aspirin, and you guys are going up almost double on her prescription costs because she's in a different bracket than Maria. I feel bad for her.

When I was a reporter, every now and then I'd get assigned to do a story on the Raging Grannies. The Raging Grannies would be out there singing songs, making fun, and protesting government action. I'm expecting the Raging Grannies to be storming Queen's Park at some point, talking about seniors and the cuts that the Liberal government has forced upon them. I tell you this: The Raging Grannies are not amused. You will be hearing from the Raging Grannies, and I think that's a good prediction.

We talk a good game. We brought in the agricultural crop insurance plan last year and we said we're going to protect farmers with beef and pork. Well, guess what? There's no money in the budget for it. We said at the time, "Show me the money." There's no money in the budget. In fact, they cut the ag ministry by \$20 million. Then municipal affairs and housing: another \$20-million cut. After the budget, we say, "Oh, let's talk a little bit about inclusionary zoning at some point in the future." It's not in the budget.

It's not a good budget. It's not worth supporting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: Budgets are a serious time in the yearly governance cycle of Ontario. In this particular budget, we're dealing in the order of \$130 billion, and we're dealing with huge issues: hospitals, health care, infrastructure and care for the elderly.

I was taken aback by the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London and I hope the voters of Elgin–Middlesex–London are just as taken aback, because the first thing that he said when he rose in his place—he said, "Well, I'll offer my two cents to the budget." That is a dismissive attitude and that is one of the dismissive attitudes of the Tory party, because every time we've sat down—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): First of all, the House is supposed to allow the debate to take place in an orderly manner. It's the obligation of the Speaker to maintain order.

Secondly, the questions and comments are supposed to relate back to the speeches that were made, not the other questions and comments. We're responding now to the minister responsible for seniors and the Minister of Education. That's what the questions and comments are to relate to.

I'll return to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and ask him to respond to the comments made by the minister responsible for seniors or the Minister of Education.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: You're a vile person, Zimmer. Vile.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I ask the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London to withdraw that unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Shameful.

Hon. David Zimmer: Shameful. One of the things that attracts me in this budget—

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I want to just address particularly the comments from the education minister and remind her again that there's nothing in the budget about addressing the school funding formula. A number of schools in my riding are slated to close. This government, for two elections, had promised to review and address the gap in the education funding formula. Yet, again, they

have not done a thing to address the actual funding formula. Was this just another empty promise? Can we really trust them to honour their commitments when they do it just before election time? We've had two cycles here and not one thing in the budget about that.

She talked about the free education. Again, her Premier has stepped up and said, "Well, maybe we need to do a little bit of explaining. We may have run that out, and it's not exactly, if you read the detail"—a very big challenge, from my perspective.

She talked about the \$160-billion infrastructure—yet another reannouncement of the same infrastructure money they've talked about at every budget.

She talked about \$23 million going to her riding of Guelph, and that's a wonderful thing. It's great to see some investment in all of our ridings. But what I want to ask her is, did she ask any questions when she was getting that \$23 million for her riding about the 30,000 long-term-care beds they promised and committed to Ontarians they were going to redevelop? I've asked the associate minister and the minister, "Where is your plan? If you promised Ontarians 30,000 beds to be redeveloped, surely to goodness you have it."

My colleague from Elgin–Middlesex raised a couple of good points. The EAP program, the Exceptional Access Program—people are waiting three months. They cut the seniors' home renovation tax credit. They cut the family tax credit for athletic abilities, sports, those types of things that keep our children more fit.

He talked about the Assistive Devices Program. Jeff Preston from London, Ontario, was actually waiting nine months just to have his chair assessed. It should have been replaced in five years; it's now in the seventh year, and that's his lifeline.

There's a lot of things this budget could have done better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the ministers can now reply. The Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the members from Elgin–Middlesex–London and Windsor–Tecumseh, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for their comments.

I must say, Speaker, I was a little bit surprised when the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London was speaking, because he was talking about lack of funding for cancer drugs. In fact, what he failed to mention was that this budget increases the funding for cancer care by \$130 million.

The other thing I found a little bit surprising was that we heard rural members pooh-poohing the infrastructure spending. What they actually failed to mention is that this budget included \$300 million annually to small municipalities—rural and northern and small municipalities—for the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund: \$200 million of that is going to be based on just a distribution formula so that every municipality will get part of that infrastructure funding; \$100 million of it will be on an application basis. But we actually did exactly what the Association of Municipalities of Ontario asked

for, which is that the funding from the community infrastructure fund will in fact go to communities outside the GTA and be distributed.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased today to rise to speak to the budget bill this afternoon. The yearly introduction of the budget is a solemn and important part of our democratic process here in Ontario and in Canada, yet it is such a commonplace occurrence that I feel it rarely registers in a significant way outside the bubble of Queen's Park. So it comes to be taken for granted by the people of this province that the government is handling the budget with responsibility and respect. They have faith in their elected officials to treat the important duty of government of collecting and allocating their hard-earned money with diligence and respect. Unfortunately, I think this government has taken to leveraging the short duration of today's news cycles to create a budget that has just enough interesting news items to obscure the substance of their agenda.

Not-so-free tuition is a great distraction from our debt blowing past \$300 billion. Unfortunately, we also had the government running roughshod over the consultation process with this budget. They brought forward this budget before the committee had even written its report on those consultations. In fact, even the Toronto Star was prompted to remark that "the Liberal government's pretense of consultation looks like obfuscation," and that "the rules of the (rigged) game restrict not only timing but topics." The fact is, the only thing the government took away from those consultations were opportunities for nice photos and media hits, and it certainly shows.

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While the Liberal government may not be interested, my colleagues and I have been talking to the people of this province. I have spoken to families, farmers, economists, entrepreneurs, blue-collar workers, young professionals, seniors, business owners and even Ministry of Finance staff, and none of them see their interests represented in this particular budget. What they care about is the cost of hydro, how often they are shelling out money for taxes and fees, uncertain employment, wage stagnation and the untold waste they see this government committing with their tax dollars.

I hear it over and over again in coffee shops and boardrooms, in downtown Wallaceburg in my riding and in downtown Toronto. No one believes that this government is looking out for anyone's interests but their own and no one trusts this government to execute any of their plans competently.

So Mr. Speaker, I thought I would take this opportunity to tell the government what I've been hearing and put forward some ideas for discussion. There are no silver bullets to solve our financial situation. Instead, experience has shown that it will take a series of ideas, significant structural changes, real economic growth and related employment growth, among other things, to turn Ontario's economy around and get back in the black.

Small businesses are the economic engines of our communities right across this province. In January, I spent time meeting with and learning from small businesses across my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. For me, it's vitally important to get out and meet with the people throughout my riding and to see first-hand about what is working, what needs improvement and where the government of Ontario can do better.

Speaker, I got such a wonderful response from those small businesses that I decided to expand on that short tour and engage with people right across the province. I wanted to hear from a wide variety of people and businesses to better understand their concerns and how we could get the government working for them again. Over the past several weeks and continuing for several more weeks, I've been meeting with dozen of industry groups, job creators, thought leaders, economists, academics and moms and dads.

One of the first things I heard was that it's time to scrap the Drive Clean program. In the budget, we did actually see some window-dressing around this issue, since the government has said they will eliminate the fee for that program. But the testing itself is still in place. People will still be inconvenienced, still have to pay for costly work on their vehicles, still have to go drive around pointlessly because sometimes that's what the computers need to get a correct reading. And for what? This isn't an effective environmental program anymore. It's an arbitrary requirement that is outdated. In my riding, in the community of Lambton Shores, neighbours down one side of a certain street will have to go get tested, while the people on the other side of the street don't have to. It's time to do away with this program altogether. The half measure of cutting the fee is great, but it is only a half measure.

Speaker, I also continue to hear about the estate administration tax, and I'm quite confident most MPPs in the Legislature do as well. I have yet to meet anyone who thinks this tax is fair or makes sense. You may remember that I introduced a private member's bill to roll back and cap the death tax. Later, our PC leader, Patrick Brown, introduced his own bill, which would have wound down and cancelled the death tax entirely. The Liberals defeated both of these bills, but the problem still remains. I know the death tax is something that everyone is hearing about, as I said. This issue has been around for years, and it's time this government takes notice and addresses it.

I also spoke with real estate agents, homeowners and young people who aspire to home ownership. We discussed ideas on how to make it easier to buy and sell a home in Ontario. Specific ideas discussed included capping the property tax at inflation and eliminating the land transfer tax. I believe these important ideas would bring the dream and stability of homeownership closer to becoming a reality for many in Ontario.

I'm pleased to see this budget hasn't expanded the land transfer tax, because I know that was a strong possibility, and the minister and the government, I believe,

considered that. We need to be eliminating barriers to home ownership, not creating new ones.

Taxes were something that I heard about over and over again. There's a feeling that our tax code is outdated and overly complex. One idea that I heard was to immediately form a committee charged with bringing forward recommendations and a sensible plan to begin modernizing, simplifying and flattening our tax code in Ontario. I agree with that idea. I think it's about time that we sat down and looked at our tax code comprehensively so we can ensure it is optimized and that it represents our priorities. When we add to and take bits from it year after year, it can cease to be cohesive and coherent.

Speaker, I also heard time and time again about the proposed ORPP. Taking more money out of people's pockets in the economy today so a government with, quite frankly, a poor fiscal record can take charge of it doesn't make any sense to people in the province. Why would you trust your retirement savings to a program instigated by a government that paid over \$1 billion to not build gas plants, or that took a \$61-million loss on the sale of Ontera, a crown agency, and paid more for consultants than it received for the telecommunications company itself?

The government has been all over the place with the ORPP, first promising to scrap it if the federal Liberals were elected, then saying they were going ahead anyway, and then delaying it for a year. Even after the announcement of the delay, I continue to see ads for it all over the place. There isn't a clear message on the ORPP. But I can tell you that the more people learn about it, the less they like it.

The bottom line is that when a government doesn't consult with the people to create their budget, they create a budget that isn't for the people. In the end, the policies they have trotted out rest on taking more and more money from taxpayers, and then periodically changing up who gets a small break so they can take a picture and pitch a good-news story.

The reality which underpins all of this is the debt this government has run up. By their own admission and according to their own numbers, this budget will push the province's debt over \$300 billion for the first time in our history. It has been said many times before, but it is worth saying again, that we are now the most indebted subsovereign borrower in the world. There isn't a state or a province in the world that owes as much as Ontario does. The interest payments on the debt alone are costing almost \$1 billion each and every single month.

This reality is distorting our economic decisions. It lays a punishing weight on young families and our elderly alike. This government has devised myriad ways to raid our pockets again and again, from raising the tax on alcohol to licence fees to textbooks to gasoline. So whether you are heating your home, filling up the tank of your car, signing your kid up for hockey or going to university, or if you're a senior who needs medication, your cost of living is going up.

Life is getting harder, as it has, year by year, for over a decade in Ontario. And yet, as much money as we

transfer from our bank accounts to government coffers, the Liberal government's spending outpaces it. They are mortgaging our children's future with deficit after deficit, choosing their own short-term gain over our long-term well-being at almost every turn.

Nine years of deficits, and along the way they have doubled the accumulated debt and driven our debt-to-GDP ratio from 27% to over 40% today, a 48% increase in less than 10 years.

Thirty years ago, the provincial debt was a manageable \$31.5 billion. Nine years ago, it had grown to \$153 billion. Today, it has doubled to our current \$308 billion. That's right, Mr. Speaker: In nine years, Ontario's debt has grown by more than 100%, the highest rate of debt growth of any provincial government in the country. Obviously, this trend cannot be allowed to continue. We simply cannot afford it.

But instead of spending responsibly, the government raids a contingency fund, sells off our assets and raises taxes. Even after they have picked every available pocket, the debt will rise to \$308.3 billion. Our interest payments are expected to rise to \$13.1 billion per year by 2018-19.

I believe that until Ontario's poor financial state is properly addressed, the government will continue—and will be forced—to cut funding to doctors, to close much-needed schools like demonstration schools in our part of the province down in London, and to raise hydro rates to make up for their financial shortfalls.

I introduced the Capping Ontario's Debt Act, Bill 168, a few weeks ago. If passed, my bill would amend the Financial Administration Act to implement a provincial debt cap that prevents the government from raising or borrowing money if the effect of doing so would cause Ontario's net debt to exceed 45% of its GDP.

1710

Speaker, Ontario taxpayers are demanding a credible plan to balance the books and pay down the debt. This is an important conversation that we have to have as a province. Unfortunately, we see a finance minister and a Premier trying to distort this conversation by talking about the deficit as if it were something to be proud of.

The National Post explained this phenomenon well: "Ontario has had a deficit for so long, and at such a size, that it has managed to change the very meaning of 'success' as it pertains to such shortfalls. In Ontario, 'success' only requires beating whatever target the government sets for its annual shortfall. Since they set the projection themselves this isn't hard to do...."

"Imagine wandering into your bank, waving your latest credit card statement, which shows that after a decade of trying you still haven't managed to pay off the balance. In fact the balance is growing like an out-of-control tumour, and eating up more money than almost any other expenditure. 'Hey, look,' you boast, 'it's not as bad as I thought! I thought they were going to seize my car, but I may still get another month out of it!'"

Another distortion we see in this conversation, Speaker, is that the Liberal government never dis-

tinguishes between spending and investing. It may come as news to some across the aisle, but the words “spending” and “investing” are not interchangeable. It isn’t investing in our economy when there is no discernible return on investment, no proof that it will create efficiencies or boost productivity. When the spending is financed by taking money out of the pockets of families and investors, as is the case with their cap-and-trade scheme and the ORPP, we are kneecapping our economy and limiting growth.

This government thinks they know what to do with people’s money better than they do, and that a small, elite group is better equipped to make decisions about what an individual’s or family’s priorities should be. Yet the Liberal government track record proves they are patently unqualified to do this.

The Auditor General highlighted this tendency of the government in her investigation of the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, where hand-picked companies are invited to partake of subsidies and no one bothers to track whether the jobs they create are long-term or whether the so-called investment achieves anything else. In the Auditor General’s own words, “The Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure ... has not attempted to measure whether the \$1.4 billion it provided to Ontario businesses since 2004 actually strengthened the economy or made recipients more competitive.”

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the ministry’s new strategic investment framework does not include a plan for how to measure outcomes from future economic development and employment supports. Or we can talk about how this government does not track the total funding that ministries and agencies invest in research and development—over \$1.9 billion given to universities over the past five years—and doesn’t evaluate the impact of that research.

This government keeps throwing money around, but they just can’t get anything right. They’re nickel-and-diming the families and small businesses of this province, collecting taxes and fees from hard-working people who are struggling with their hydro and grocery bills, and then they fritter this money away without bothering to check if it did any good at all. We desperately need an alternative to the Liberals’ top-down, big-spending, government-driven approach. People are sick and tired of hearing about the Premier’s aspirations and stretch goals. They’re sick and tired of scandals and poorly run programs.

Speaker, what we need to see in this province—what I would like to have seen in this budget—is a bottom-up productivity program which encourages the efficient use of capital and isn’t rife with subsidies that distort investment decisions. Instead of paying profitable companies to come to Ontario, we should be creating the conditions that entice businesses and bolster the companies that are already here. Frankly, I don’t see any movement in that direction from this government.

This is a budget that firmly establishes that they intend to trudge on with the status quo at a time when it’s clear

to everyone that change is desperately needed in the province of Ontario. The debt and the cost of servicing the debt are going to continue to crowd out vital services. I should put it on the record again, Mr. Speaker, to remind the government that every man, woman and child in the province now owes \$22,000 each, through no fault of their own, quite frankly. I think of our family: my wife, Kate, myself and our daughter. Our family alone is responsible for \$66,000 in Ontario debt.

Of course, we know that tomorrow we’re going to see a big-spending, big-taxing federal budget in Ottawa, which is only going to compound the fiscal challenges that we have in our province.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, I will not support this budget. I won’t support a budget that makes our province more unaffordable, uncompetitive and unsustainable.

I’m proud of the work of our finance critic, Mr. Fedeli, the member from Nipissing. I know he was on SCOFEA as well, and he went around the province with the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and other caucus members.

It’s just really disheartening when we see a story like we saw today, where they faked, quite frankly, the consultation process. They tried to fake the good people of Ontario. We often see this: When a government has been in power for as long as this Liberal government has, they completely lose touch with the people that they represent. I feel the decisions that they’re making are just so out of touch with what the people out there want. I’ve only been here now for almost five years, but I sense that we have a government that’s living in this Queen’s Park bubble. If they’re talking to the people in Ontario like I’m talking to the people, and my colleagues—there are big problems in the province. They can’t ignore, as members of this government, the expensive energy bills that they’re hearing about. People are choosing, like the member from Nipissing says, between heating their home and putting food on their table—and hydro bills; sorry—and I think it’s very unfortunate that Ontario has come to this place because of intentional decisions by this government.

As I said in the beginning, there have been announcements by the government, like the not-so-free tuition, but that’s just a distraction from the huge challenges of this debt that we have in the province. They’re ignoring the \$308-billion debt that we have, and I hope they come to their senses before they pass this budget to deal with this problem.

Mr. Speaker, it was great to speak to the budget bill today. Thanks.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I guess what struck me with what we just heard from the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is the great pretender budget, if you will—pretending to listen, pretending to consult with the people, and yet, as we heard earlier, sending the budget documents out to be translated long before the consultation by the committee that was going around the province

had ever finished and long before the committee sat down and wrote a report on just what they heard.

I remember earlier the minister responsible for seniors was talking about Maria. Maria said, "How can they say something on one side of the House and you guys say something on the other side of the House? Is somebody lying? What's going on?" It's a matter of the interpretation of the facts. If we stand up, Maria, and we say, "They pretended they listened to you, but they didn't really, because they had already sent their document out for translation," that's the truth. There's no lie there; that is the truth. They pretended they were listening when in fact they had already made up their minds. When we hear the Premier say, "Oh, I'd never sell Hydro One," and then she gets convinced otherwise and then starts selling it off in pieces, even though 200 municipalities passed motions saying stop and polling shows 80% of the people of Ontario don't want it sold, it's being sold.

The president of the United Senior Citizens of Ontario is a guy I know. His name is Gerry Graham. He's a former auto worker from Windsor, but he lives in Kingsville now. When you talk about prescription costs going up and the deductible fee going up and the co-pay going up by a dollar, he says many seniors in Ontario can't afford it and seniors don't deserve it. I think those are the facts.

1720

Maria, you may not be paying, but most seniors in Ontario will be paying more for their prescription drugs, and that's the—

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. I agree with one thing that he said and that was that what we need is real economic growth. That's what this budget sets out to address, with the investment in infrastructure and public transit and the services that people depend on.

I do find it interesting, as a quick aside, that he mentioned Drive Clean and the estate administration tax, both of which his party instituted. But we won't go there. We will not go there.

I know, on the other side across, that members support the hospitals in their ridings. They support the schools in their ridings. They support those services that people depend on, because I hear them talking about it every day in the House. Every day here, they talk about it, and that's good. Then I hear, in the same breath, "Well, we shouldn't be running a deficit."

Government is about choices. You have to make a choice. In 2009, we made a choice. We made a choice to invest in stimulus, like the federal government did. We made a choice to invest in the auto sector. That's not a choice that they would have made on the other side; they made that very clear. So—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm getting heckled from my own side here.

The point is, you have to pick a lane, and you guys aren't picking a lane right now. You're not picking a lane. You're saying, "No, we don't want to have a deficit, but just make sure you have all this stuff that the people in my riding are asking me for."

You can't say both things. Leadership is picking a lane, and no one's picking a lane over there. Maybe they might want to think about it.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the comments, the thoughtful 20 minutes we had from the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. He brought up some very, very good points.

Some of the issues that we heard about are the costs to families and seniors that will be happening out of this budget. Of course, there are the annual sin taxes, as they're called—alcohol and cigarettes—that will be taxed further.

But it was the cost to seniors that I heard about on our constituency week last week. In fact, in the office I had a group of seniors come and talk about the fact that for all of them in the office, the cost of their drugs will double under this budget. When this budget comes for passage sometime early in April—the 11th or 12th or 13th of April—those seniors' medication costs will double.

Right now, as the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex mentioned, you have to choose between whether to heat or eat. But now it's getting to be the choice of whether to eat or to buy your medications. That's very serious, because these are, in many cases for the seniors—and 92% of all seniors in the province of Ontario are going to see their medication costs almost double. So they're going to have to make those difficult choices.

When you think about their grandkids as well, with the Children's Activity Tax Credit cancelled, and when you think about the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit that got cancelled—this government, because of their waste, their mismanagement and their scandals, is now trying to balance the budget on the backs of children, seniors and families. I find that reprehensible, especially for the seniors who were in my office in North Bay last week.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that the member from Lambton-Kent and I would agree around the financial mismanagement piece. We have a growing body of evidence. We have Auditor General report after report.

The last one, just before Christmas, came out, and the Auditor General reported that "between 2006 and 2014, thanks to incompetence and mismanagement on the part of the province's Liberal government, Ontarians overpaid for electricity to the tune of \$37-billion." This was from the Globe and Mail, but it was commenting on the AG's report.

Over the next 18 years, though, the AG has predicted that consumers will overpay by another \$133 billion.

These numbers are so big that I'm speechless, in my two minutes.

The other commentary, though, and the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex didn't get into this, is that the Toronto Star says, "Rarely has a Liberal government in Ontario tabled a less child-friendly budget than Jobs for Today and Tomorrow."

Think about this: no money for child care. There's no money, even though the research, even though the evidence is very clear and we had a Premier who said she was going to rule from the activist centre and put that research and evidence into play; even though, in 2016, if you want to address poverty in the province of Ontario, you invest in child care. We know this. We know this to be true. There's no new money for that.

The privatization of group homes—this came out last week, Mr. Speaker.

This government seems content to just sideline these important public services that keep kids safe in the province of Ontario.

So you can't blame us for not supporting this budget. There are completely unethical components of this budget which make it impossible for us to support, especially around the financial mismanagement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe that concludes our questions and comments.

I return now to the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for his reply.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. I thought that was a great line, and it eloquently describes what I was trying to say, by saying that they're the great pretenders. I think that's exactly what this budget is. Again, that consultation process is really disturbing. I'm assuming that all the MPPs, even on the government side, will be disappointed in their own government, in their own Premier's office and finance department's office for faking a consultation process.

I'd like to thank my friend from Ottawa South; our finance critic from our caucus, from Nipissing; and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who added to our debate.

Speaker, the bottom line is that when a government doesn't consult with people to create a budget, they create a budget that isn't for the people of Ontario. That's exactly what we're seeing here.

In the end, they have policies that are going to take more and more money from people. It's going to make it a lot tougher to live in Ontario if you're a young family or seniors on a fixed income. If you want to do business in this province, it's going to be much harder. They are literally nickel-and-diming people out of Ontario. They come up with creative ways to raid our pockets again and again, and yet they use the same old, same old as well, as far as raising taxes on alcohol. But now they're increasing licence fees, textbooks—a 4.3 cents-a-litre gas tax increase. It's really disturbing to see in Ontario.

This is a government that has been in power for 13 years, Mr. Speaker. They have lost touch with the people

that they represent. Unfortunately, we're two years from a change in government.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's great to have a few minutes to weigh in on this budget. In my view, this budget has the wrong priorities. It does little or nothing to help the vast majority of people who live in this province. It's a—the new buzzword—"stretch goal" budget. For most Ontarians, things are not changing for the better. It's full of more cuts that are going to stretch household budgets and make it harder, particularly for seniors and families, to stay healthy.

It's a budget, in fact, that was actually tabled before the budget committee even had the ability to write their report and inform the budget after they had travelled to six or seven sites across the province. How disrespectful of MPPs' time and staff time that you wouldn't even wait until that report was tabled to assist you in putting your budget together.

The budget doesn't provide adequate funding to deal with our aging population and our population growth. There are increases of just 1.9% over the last year for health and for long-term care, but it won't keep up with the population growth or the cost of aging. Really, it is a reduction in those budgets. There have been four straight years of freezing of funding for hospitals, and this small increase is not going to enable hospitals to keep up with inflation.

1730

It means that, with inflation, with population growth, with aging, this increase is ultimately a cut to health care; and that that overall 340-something million dollars, at the end of the day, is still, when you look at the 82 or 85 hospital systems across the province, a cut to most of them. We're going to continue to see cuts to nurses, cuts to RPNs, and cuts to other health care professionals in the system that we've been hearing about.

We heard today, actually, about a hospital in my riding, in Welland. There is now a planning proposal to close the fourth hospital in the Niagara region. They closed Fort Erie; then they closed Port Colborne; then they closed Niagara-on-the-Lake; and now they're proposing to actually close Welland. It's unprecedented that a hospital would close in an area that supports 100,000 people in Welland, in Port Colborne, in Wainfleet and in Pelham. Pelham isn't even in my riding, but certainly many people from Mr. Hudak's riding actually use the Welland hospital and the Port Colborne urgent care centre.

Reports in the local newspaper talk about replacing that with a—well, not quite an urgent centre and not quite an emergency, but the reports say that they would be able to stabilize critical patients. But in the next sentence in the report in the local paper, it said that ambulances would not be directed to that facility. I don't know how many critical patients you know are actually going to arrive at a hospital—well, not a hospital anymore. In fact,

they don't know what to call it, because they say it's going to be more—

Ms. Catherine Fife: They're making it up as they go along.

Ms. Cindy Forster: They're making it up as they go along. It's not going to be an emergency. It's not going to be an urgent care centre. It's going to be something in between. I can't see people arriving by bus or in a taxi or in a private car who are critical and need to be stabilized. I think that that is just a myth and I don't believe it for one minute.

Locally, we have thousands of people on wait-lists waiting for long-term-care beds. Many of those patients are actually sitting in hospital beds. There's no plan by the Liberal government to actually increase any of the numbers of long-term-care beds in Niagara or anywhere across the province.

I have a friend, Bob, who had some surgery on his leg about two months ago at the St. Catharines hospital—the new hospital in the minister without portfolio's riding. He had the surgery, but he ended up having to remain hospitalized, so they transferred him to the Port Colborne site of the Niagara Health System, where they've got, probably, I don't know, 60 beds open. Half of those beds are people waiting for long-term care and the other are patients requiring rehab, who need to have some slow physiotherapy rehab. Bob actually ended up in the hospital for 60 days after his surgery. What will Bob do when there are no beds left in Port Colborne, there are no beds left in Fort Erie and there are no beds left in Welland? Patients like Bob, who had surgery but can't go home because they need the slow rehab, will have no place to go.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We could set them up here at Queen's Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, yes.

I also had the opportunity this week to meet with a lot of seniors in my riding. I went at the request of one of my local residents to meet her father-in-law. We often talk about the five-day home care guarantee that the Liberals actually promised us back in 2012 but that was never delivered. Ann asked me to go and visit with her father-in-law. She'd had the CCAC in and she wanted him to be assessed for a bath. The only thing she wanted was a bath once or twice a week for a 96-year-old man. He'll be 96 on October 24. He has short-term memory loss. He walks with a walker. If he doesn't use the walker, he shuffles.

The Liberals talk a good game about wanting people to remain in their own homes, but this man can't even get one bath. When he had his assessment by the CCAC, they said that if he could shuffle off to the bathroom, to the sink, then he didn't require any care from the CCAC. It is pathetic. The man is incontinent. For those of you who don't know what that word is, he dribbles all the time. So at least that man, based on the fact that he's incontinent, shouldn't be told, "Well, buy some Depends. We're not giving him a bath." The man's 70-year-old daughter-in-law—daughter-in-law, imagine this—has to go in and give this man a bath. He's embarrassed, and

she's embarrassed. I tell you, it's not right. But that's the kind of health care system that we're having delivered by the Liberal government here.

According to the Ontario Nurses' Association, 1,200 nurses have been laid off since January 2015. Today I want to tell the nurses that the Liberal government, in the clause-by-clause on the PTSD bill, voted against nurses being included in the presumptive legislation because, "They have the ability anyway to file a compensation claim, and they don't experience trauma in the same way that first responders do." Well, I can tell you, as a nurse, that nurses experience trauma each and every day that they go to work. I think it's shameful that the Liberals would not include nurses and front-line health care workers in this legislation, and actually have the gall to do it.

These cuts to nursing and cuts to other regulated health professionals and cuts to RPNs—let's get the story straight here. RNs are being replaced by RPNs, who are being replaced by PSWs, who are being replaced by volunteers. Have you seen the ads lately in your local newspapers? They're looking for volunteers in every hospital in the system to go and bring water or apple juice to a patient lying in the hallway in the emergency department or to transfer patients from the emergency room up to their floor.

If you've got a person in the emergency department that needs to be admitted, surely they should have a person with some credentials actually transporting them to their room. I can tell you that just today, I got stuck in this elevator with 10 people here in the Legislature. Imagine being stuck in an elevator in a hospital with a patient, as a volunteer. What's happening is that we're just pushing everybody down in the system.

I want to talk a bit about seniors, because—time goes quickly when you're actually talking—I had an opportunity to visit a number of seniors this week. I was at the Friends Over 55 Recreation Centre in Port Colborne. There were about 100 seniors out there on Saturday morning for breakfast. I was at the Congress of Union Retirees in Hamilton. I met with a large contingent of seniors there. I also met with CARP Niagara at Ina Grafton in the minister without portfolio's riding this week. There were about 60 seniors out there.

I have to tell you, they were very disappointed in the Liberal government, about their failure to consult them about prescription increases. None of them were aware of it until it hit the fan on budget day, and it nearly doubles the cost for some of those seniors.

The most interesting part about it all was, I was quoting some StatsCan figures about what the government collects in income information for seniors. I was quoting the figure of around \$25,000 for a single woman, \$30,000 for a single man and \$50,000 for a couple. I can tell you, I had a barrage of e-mails and phone calls from seniors' centres around Niagara when they heard that information on local radio that day, saying, "Those figures can't be correct. I don't know any single woman

who has an income of \$25,000 a year; none of my friends do.” That was the word I heard.

I heard from—Minister Bradley will know—the woman from the West St. Catharines Older Adult Centre, Peggy. She said, “Your numbers have to be wrong, Cindy.” So we sent her the information and we said, “Well, now, this is the median.” In fact, 50% of the two million seniors who live in this province are lower than that \$25,000 a year for a single senior.

The Liberals told us today and they told us the last time we were here that they thought that \$19,300 was an okay cap—

Mr. Paul Miller: Affluent.

Ms. Cindy Forster: That’s an affluent senior. Well, the seniors in Niagara will tell you that they’re not rich and that they can’t afford to pay more.

1740

Now, when I went to talk to the union of retirees in Hamilton, it was very interesting because a lot of them had some great stories to tell me. I’m going to just share a couple of those with you because I think hearing it exactly from seniors’ mouths may make a difference to the government. I hope it will make a difference.

In St. Catharines, CARP Niagara had reported to me that they had surveyed their members with respect to this new budget measure, with respect to the drugs, and 10% of CARP’s members who responded to the survey told them that they don’t fill their prescriptions on a regular basis because it means either a prescription or it means food. So, 10% of the people who responded; I think that’s very telling.

When I went to Hamilton, the seniors who were there talked about the hidden seniors, the fact that there are many seniors living in poverty who we don’t know about, who we don’t even talk about here as politicians.

Many of them don’t have dental coverage. One of the seniors who was there told me his teeth were falling out, but he is living on such a low pension that he can’t afford to go and have dental work.

There were also injured workers at this meeting. Some of them are retired injured workers who retired much earlier than they would have liked to and ended up on OW or ODSP. They’re still fighting their compensation claims. They have no pension. They talked about the ORPP and they said that the ORPP isn’t going to do them any good and it isn’t going to do anybody who is on compensation or on disability or on Canada pension disability any good because none of those people will be paying into that pension plan. So for anybody who’s really vulnerable and struggling today, it isn’t going to help them anyway.

Many seniors are supporting their adult children. Their kids can’t get a job because their kids are in that “contemporary mobile employment” that the member from Scarborough talked about. It’s that new sexy word for precarious work. So their kids can’t get a job, they can’t leave home. And in many cases, they’re raising their grandchildren, too. Some of them are raising their grandchildren full-time, with the parents of the kids not

even being there, and they’re doing this on \$25,000 a year.

Henry, who was at this meeting, told me that he didn’t believe that selling off Hydro One was a good thing for seniors. In fact, they’ve seen their hydro bills increase by 30% over the last year. They need to make a choice now: “Am I going to heat the house or am I going to buy food? Now, am I going to buy my drugs? Am I going to get my prescriptions or buy food or pay the hydro bill?”

They don’t believe that it’s a fair choice to make and they don’t believe that private benefit costs—some of the seniors who retired had benefit plans, like the steelworkers, who have now lost their benefits that, I might add, they negotiated and they gave up wage increases to have those benefit plans in place for a secure retirement. After giving up those wage increases as the alternative to those benefits, they now find they have no benefits.

So some of them are being offered private company benefit plans, but the seniors I met said they’re too cost-prohibitive—\$200, \$300 a month minimum, and they escalate each year as you get older, regardless of the usage. So that is a problem for them.

Lena, a USW retiree—actually the member from Stoney Creek probably knows her—told me about a woman who she knows who’s on post-chemotherapy drugs, and the injection is \$1,500 a month and it is not covered. She’s a senior, and it is not covered in the provincial program. So she has to come up with \$1,500 a month for this drug. So she has to make choices, as well.

Many of the seniors—both there and in St. Catharines—talked about the delisting of drugs off the list, which continues every year to be a problem, and the fact there’s a drug shortage and that drug companies aren’t being held to account to produce those drugs because they’re not profitable anymore, because there are more expensive drugs on the market that they want to sell and they don’t want to make those drugs any more. But nobody’s talking about how that impacts the seniors in our community.

I also met with Georgina Lebon, who is a former federal employee. She’s on the Council of Canadians. She’s a federal retiree. She talked about the people she works with on a regular basis. There was one senior man there—this story was very telling. He’s still working. He’s 65, and he is not in a job that has a pension. So at the end of the day, he’s going to be on OAS, CPP and the guaranteed income supplement. He talked about waking up every morning worried, worried every day about how he’s going to live at age 65 without any pension. He says, “When I wake up in the morning, I say, ‘Fudge, I’m awake; I’d rather be asleep,’” because he is so worried, day in and day out, about living in poverty in his senior years.

Malcolm Buchanan was at the meeting as well. He’s the president of the union retirees. He’s a retired teacher. He talked about living very comfortably in his retirement years, because teachers invested 13% or 14% of their income into a pension plan. But we see today, with many

of those public pensions, that the government is trying to negotiate them away, right?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Strip them.

Ms. Cindy Forster: They're trying to strip their pensions. They're trying to push them out the door by reducing their retirement benefits. Just this week, someone in my constit office was in and talked about perhaps being forced to retire at the end of this year. Otherwise he'll have retirement benefits, but he'll have to pay somewhere around \$1,600 a year to maintain those benefits.

The seniors said that politicians and budgets need to reflect seniors and their issues. They believe they're constantly being ignored. They built our hospitals, they built our schools, and for the money that they invested into taxes in this province, they should be treated better. They don't think they're being treated very well.

Seniors say that politicians need to be educating youth, particularly youth. They're concerned about the youth. The seniors' story is not being adequately told. They think the youth don't understand how important pensions and benefits actually are, and that we as politicians should be making them aware of that.

As I said, many of them were supporting their grandchildren and their children. Many of their health care costs are out of pocket. If they need physio or they need their dentures relined or they need eyeglasses, all of those things are out of pocket, and that's hard to do on \$19,300—

Mr. Paul Miller: That's affluent.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, that's affluent.

It's hard to do on \$25,000 a year, if you're trying to maintain your house.

My last little story is about a guy named Royce. He said that what is really telling to him is that all of his neighbours have moved. He didn't live in an affluent area, he said. All of these people were his friends, and they've all moved because none of them could afford to stay in their houses. They've all moved into apartments. He said, "I miss my neighbours. I look around and there's nobody there anymore." They couldn't, because of the taxes going up and the food going up and the hydro and the water bills going up.

That's the story of seniors in today's world.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was hoping the member for what's going to be called Niagara Centre would have included in her speech some comments about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, which I know is a favourite topic of hers and a concern of many people in the Niagara Peninsula. I thought I'd get that on the record, that she had expressed concern about that.

Again, I can't believe I was that negative in opposition. Tell me I wasn't, Toby.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Oh, you were.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Oh, he says I was. Okay, I'm sorry.

The opposition obviously has the role of bringing out anything they believe to be negative in the budget, and the government members will talk about the good things.

I happened to be speaking to a group of student leaders at Brock University—they had come from various places in the province—about the new initiative to reduce the cost of education overall to students in the province—post-secondary education—in an effort to be able to have more of them access it without the pay-cheque of their parents being the main influence. They were very pleased with the changes that were being made to that particular aspect of their lives. So that was a positive one.

1750

I also keep looking at the uploading that's taking place on an ongoing basis from municipalities. You don't hear that from municipal leaders, by the way. Some of them actually criticized the provincial government for incurring a deficit. Meanwhile, of course, we're incurring the deficit so we can assume more costs that municipalities once had, costs that were forced upon them by the previous Conservative government. I know the member was concerned about that when it happened.

I go back to the last issue—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: He's being negative.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, let me say this first of all: Parties in opposition, like the NDP, speak in a certain way, and that's their role and responsibility. Look at what the NDP does in power when they're faced with the reality of public office, and probably people were critical of them at that time. They should recognize that there is a big responsibility when you actually have to govern the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to my colleague from Welland. She brought a lot of good points to the table. She talked a lot about seniors, and as the critic for seniors, it's something that I certainly am very much paying attention to.

It's been talked about here a lot today, that as many as 92% of Ontarians surveyed said that long-term-care homes are not being staffed to meet the diverse and increasingly acute medical and mental care needs of seniors. Yet there was nothing in that budget to address the 30,000 beds that they promised two elections ago. We know those beds are not even touching what the new need is going to be. There are 24,000 seniors on a waiting list, and they're predicting—by the Ontario Long Term Care Association—that that will double to 50,000 in just six years.

She talked about the cost of drugs and the doubling, almost, of the cost to those seniors, and again a significant challenge to many of them that we're going to have. I had a news conference here last week where we had the Ontario seniors' association and the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. They were very, very concerned about the im-

fact of this budget on seniors that they so loyally represent.

Mr. Speaker, we talked and the member for Welland talked as well about the debt that this government has incurred: \$12 billion a year. I just want to reiterate for the record: \$12 billion, if we had it in a bank account rather than paying interest payments, could fund a year of long-term care for 222,043 seniors; it could fund 44,120 beds in a palliative care unit for one year; it could fund 40,347 hospital beds for one year; or it could fund 169,052,488 MRI scans.

It's deplorable that this government continues to come out and pat themselves on the back. They're hungry to stay in power. They're going to tell people what they think they want to hear, but the regret is, as an opposition member, that we need to hold them to account because they have run our province into a very challenging fiscal hole.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the member from Welland brought the debate on health care in the province of Ontario to a very personal level and to a very honest level, because these are the lived experiences of seniors in the province of Ontario.

The privatization of health care continues to be an ongoing and emerging issue. We are seeing it each and every day. My dad right now is in a hospital in Kitchener; he's in St. Mary's hospital. When he was admitted over the weekend, the doctor on call said, "Do you have coverage for medical benefits?" My stepmother still works, and he said, "Well, then if you have benefits, you can get the good blood thinner." I mean, "the good blood thinner"; so there's a more expensive version and then there's a cheap version. But the thing is that we're all the same and we're all supposed to be supporting a universal health care system, and yet for seniors in the province of Ontario, they see their rights as seniors being whittled away. They're living it, so it doesn't really matter what the advertising says.

This government has an advertising issue. The Auditor General has identified that. Even over the last week, we learned that this government paid \$6.2 million in legal fees to sell off Hydro One. This government advertised \$600,000 worth of commercials on the ORPP, so that adds insult to injury to these seniors because they see that they're not going to benefit from it. They see right through this government.

I think that the member from Welland actually identified this very clearly and brought those voices to this place, and that is her job. It isn't about just being an opposition member and about criticizing; it's about bringing the voices of Ontarians to this Legislature, hoping—some of us praying—that you may actually listen to those voices and change this policy.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd just like to say that I believe this budget is a great budget. At the end of the year, the

\$5.7-billion deficit—we will balance, which is what the opposition has been asking for, and the third party.

There's good news for students. The organized students are very happy about this. The students who were up there today when we were talking about it knew that they weren't to clap. They were clapping their thumbs together. They were, obviously, secondary school students.

The municipalities have asked for more money for infrastructure. We have given over \$300 million to the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund.

There is \$30 million for Connecting Links. There's more money for GO services. I know that people in my area are thrilled with that.

There's more money for capital for schools.

There's more money for hospitals. The hospitals asked for an end of the freeze to the budget, and that has happened. There's \$130 million more for cancer care. There's 5% more for home care, which is where we believe people want to be, rather than in a hospital, where it's expensive.

I've heard the opposition talk about heat or eat. The money from cap-and-trade, \$100 million, will go to home retrofits for those people who are spending a lot of money on heating.

There's \$178 million for affordable housing, which we know is needed. It is about time that everybody got on board with this.

Special-needs children will have \$17.8 million more.

Drive Clean has been eliminated. I don't know why people are so upset about that.

I urge you to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, but the member for Welland can reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks to all who weighed in on this.

The minister without portfolio talked about me being negative. I don't think that it's negative to actually bring forward constituents'—particularly seniors'—stories on how many challenges they're experiencing just trying to get through a day as a senior.

The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound raised some good points about mental health services, in particular, that are sorely lacking in this budget, and the 30,000 beds and other broken promises while thousands wait on wait-lists across the province.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo was talking about bringing voices here to Queen's Park. That's what we're elected to do. We're elected to bring forward the voices of the 105,000 or 110,000 people whom we represent.

The member from Barrie can spout all she wants about what a great budget this is, but every ministry is getting a 6% cut, with the exception of health care and community and social services, where the increases are not enough to even talk about.

I'm going to use my last 45 seconds to talk about a senior who has a house in the St. Catharines riding. Her

husband died; he had a pension but it's not that much. She's probably surviving on \$2,500 a month. She would like to sell her house but she doesn't have enough money to actually fix her house to get the best price for that house. So she remains in it without having enough money to actually do the repairs. When you talk about people wanting to remain in their house, well, yes, they do, if they have enough income. But here is a government that actually ended the renovation tax credit

because they said there wasn't enough uptake. There isn't enough uptake because the seniors can't afford to actually front that \$15,000 to get a tax credit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It is 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
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Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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