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Thursday 5 May 2016

Jeudi 5 mai 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 May 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 mai 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENERGY STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT
DES LOIS SUR L'ÉNERGIE

Mr. Chiarelli moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 135, An Act to amend several statutes and revoke several regulations in relation to energy conservation and long-term energy planning / Projet de loi 135, Loi modifiant plusieurs lois et abrogeant plusieurs règlements en ce qui concerne la conservation de l'énergie et la planification énergétique à long terme.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the minister.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'm pleased to share my time today with my colleague, the hard-working member from Burlington, Eleanor McMahon.

Speaker, today I rise to move third reading of Bill 135, the Energy Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015. This proposed legislation would accomplish several very important measures for a stronger, more collaborative energy planning process. It would improve energy transmission reliability in the province of Ontario, and the new planning regimen creates a strong platform to keep electricity rates competitive and for a strong economy.

Before I get into more detail of the proposed legislation, Speaker, I want to recognize the hard work, dedication and commitment of the Ministry of Energy staff and the staff across our energy agencies, including the Independent Electricity System Operator, the Ontario Energy Board and Ontario Power Generation, all of whom have worked tirelessly on this vital piece of legislation and the effort they devote to the energy sector throughout the province every day.

I'd also like to acknowledge energy's role in building Ontario up. Nothing is more essential to our everyday quality of life and economic success than a steady supply of clean, reliable and affordable electricity. Our economy continues to grow, and as technical and operational innovations accelerate, ratepayers, economies, industry and governments need to adapt, and adapt quickly.

I'm talking about electric cars, electrified transit, behind-the-meter generation, smart grid technology, electricity storage, innovations in renewable energy, off-grid generation, modernizing building codes and, most of all, eliminating carbon emissions. This makes our unwavering commitment to innovative, cost-effective, clean and reliable power an ongoing necessity for our economy, our environment and our quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 135 creates a reliable planning mechanism to keep electricity rates competitive and our economy strong and growing. One of the biggest myths we hear—I know it's one often promulgated by members of the opposition—is that electricity prices in Ontario are the highest in North America. This is just plain wrong. Ontario's residential electricity rates are, and will remain, competitive with jurisdictions in North America. When comparing the cost per kilowatt hour, Ontario's rates are lower than most American cities and significantly lower than electricity rates in European cities. While some Canadian provinces have lower prices than Ontario, Ontario has competitive prices with other provinces such as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and PEI.

While most other jurisdictions are still burning dirty coal for two thirds of their power, our government is proud that we have achieved competitive rates while undertaking the largest climate change initiative in North America. This requires smart planning legislation and smart planning policies.

Our 2013 long-term energy plan is putting Ontario in a competitive place. The 2013 long-term energy plan is the platform on which we're building the needs of the future through Bill 135.

Looking across Canada, Ontario's recent 2.5% bill increase is reasonable and stacks up competitively across our comparators. BC Hydro rates increased by 4% on April 1, 2016; Saskatchewan power rates were approved for a 5% increase in 2015; Manitoba Hydro applied a rate increase of 3.95% as of April 1, 2016; and Newfoundland Power applied for a rate increase of 3.6% for residential customers as of July 1. Yes, our rates went up by 2.5%; I challenge any member in the Legislature to find a jurisdiction in North America where rates are not going up. The issue is, how do you keep the increases to a minimum? That is a very, very significant issue when it comes to electricity planning.

We also recognize that the price of electricity can be difficult for those who pay a higher share of their income toward the bill, particularly low-income families and seniors on a fixed income. That's why the Ontario Energy Board launched the Ontario Electricity Support Program

for lower-income families, and that is why the debt retirement charge was removed on January 1 of this year, saving the average family a combined \$430 annually.

We also know that bills can be even harder for families and seniors in rural and remote areas that heat with electricity or use medically assistive devices. That's why we doubled the monthly benefit these families can access to up to \$100.

Bill 135, when passed, represents a planning framework that makes these price mitigation measures possible by government.

Through our planning framework, we have additional programs that help reduce bills for Ontario families. The Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit saves qualifying individuals up to \$993 per year; the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program provides emergency financial support; the saveONenergy Home Assistance Program provides free home energy efficiency assessments and energy-saving measures; and the Northern Ontario Energy Credit helps families and individuals in northern Ontario, providing individuals up to \$143 in savings.

Regarding industrial prices, northern Ontario actually has one of the lowest industrial electricity rates in North America—among the lowest in Canada and lower than 49 American states; the third-lowest in North America. Industrial rates in southern Ontario are lower than in Michigan, Wisconsin, New Jersey and California, and below the American average.

Just a few weeks ago, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Ministry of Energy to publish clear data on these facts. It's called the Ontario Energy Report and it's available on the ministry website at www.ontarioenergyreport.ca. I'm going to read that again: www.ontarioenergyreport.ca. Speaker, it's there. There's a chart showing the comparable prices. It's credible, it's objective and it shows that Ontario is doing extremely well compared to our competitors.

Bill 135, if passed, would allow a planning framework to continue and expand existing programs. Just last week, I was in Timmins discussing some of the programs the Ministry of Energy now offers to even further reduce the impact of electricity prices on the bottom line of some of Ontario's industrial consumers. That's the industrial electricity incentive. This is a program our government launched in 2012 to offer sharply discounted rates of up to 50% for job creators across the province, with a special focus on industrial consumers like the mining industry, greenhouse growers, refrigerated warehouses and data-processing centres. Speaker, I want to provide some examples of companies that are benefiting from this IEI program, which provides up to a 50% discount off their electricity bills, a program that could be expanded under the Bill 135 planning process.

0910

I was fortunate to be in Timmins to highlight two local companies, Alamos Gold and St. Andrew Goldfields, which both have made use of this program and expanded their mining operations in that region. We were up there with our staff two or three weeks ago. We had a very

positive reception, particularly from the company involved. Alamos, for example, has increased its daily gold output by 2,000 tonnes per day, creating 75 new jobs and supporting more than 700 good jobs for this community. The CEO of that company credits this program with enabling them to proceed in this way.

These two success stories in the riding of the member from Timmins–James Bay aren't the only companies participating in this program.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What about in Pembroke?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: My critic the member from Pembroke–Renfrew talks about the company in his riding that benefited very significantly and was able to rehire over 100 jobs. I appreciate the fact that my critic gives us credit, once in a while, for doing something good. Thank you.

In fact, the list of IEI program beneficiaries includes FNX Mining Company Inc., in the member from Sudbury's community; Vision Extrusions, in the member from Vaughan's community; Roelands Plant Farms Inc., in the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex's community; Amco Farms Inc., in the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex's community; Omya Canada Inc. and Tweed Inc., in the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington's community; New Gold Inc. and EACOM Timber Corp., in the member from Kenora–Rainy River's community; White River Forest Products, in the member from Algoma–Manitoulin's community; and Resolute FP Canada Inc., in the Thunder Bay community. Just for the record, Speaker, seven of these 10 examples are benefiting companies and communities that are located in opposition members' ridings.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to focus on ensuring that our electricity system is clean, reliable and affordable for all. That can only be accomplished with a modern, updated planning framework, which Bill 135 would provide. And we're continuing to make significant progress in transforming the electricity system into one that Ontarians can continue to count on for reliability, leadership and clean energy.

Speaker, when our government came to office, 25% of Ontario's generation was from very cheap but very dirty coal. A central priority of the government when it comes to energy planning was to ensure a very clean supply mix so that we'd have a healthy population, and a strong planning platform is needed to initiate these types of transformational policies. In that context, Speaker, we have closed all of our coal-fired electricity plants, helping to clean up the air that was making our kids sick and saving the province \$4.4 billion per year in environmental and health care costs. That is the largest emissions reduction action plan in North America, taking the equivalent of seven million cars' worth of emissions off the roads in Ontario, efforts that reduce carbon emissions and fight climate change. It wasn't an easy decision, Speaker, but it was one our government committed to achieve, and, as they say, promise made, promise kept.

But, Speaker, we can't lay down our tools. And one of the best tools we have, moving forward, will be Bill 135.

We've taken energy planning and electricity reliability to a level ignored under previous governments, and we have rebuilt our transmission and distribution systems, investing \$34 billion in the generation and transmission that ensure that when Ontario needs electricity, you can count on it to be there. It's easy to forget that this wasn't always the case, not long ago, and the system was crying out for proper planning frameworks.

I think we can all recall the rolling brownouts and blackouts that made Ontario an unreliable place to do business and set up shop, and that the then-PC government had installed large portable generators in downtown Toronto as a backup for an unreliable and dirty system that had a deficit of electricity. So after years and years of underinvestment, we finally turned the page and ensured that when you flip the switch, the lights will come on.

Speaker, Ontario has also recently confirmed that the future of energy planning in Ontario is strongly rooted in an affordable, reliable, emissions-free supply of baseload nuclear power. This was planned for under the 2013 long-term energy plan, the predecessor to Bill 135. Under that plan, we will continue building for the future, undertaking a very significant nuclear refurbishment plan at the Darlington and Bruce reactors.

What's truly amazing about this commitment is that all nuclear facilities in Ontario are variants of the Candu reactor design, and it's significant that more than 90% of the supply chain that supports this type of nuclear units is located right here in Ontario. That supply chain represents more than 180 companies employing tens of thousands of Ontarians in well-paying jobs.

Refurbishment is also a direct vote of confidence in this supply chain and this domestic industry. It's a vote of confidence in companies like Cambridge's BWXT Canada Ltd., which employs more than 500 people in the community, or Peterborough's General Electric Hitachi nuclear energy facility, which employs more than 350 people in highly skilled trades in the nuclear industry, or perhaps a vote of confidence in Cameco's Port Hope facility, which employs 660 people in the nuclear industry. That energy planning vote of confidence is going to create 60,000 Ontario jobs. It's going to invest \$25 billion in updated and needed energy infrastructure. It's going to drive economic growth in communities across Ontario, and it's going to secure 30 years of emissions-free power. That's amazing as well.

If all that wasn't enough, it's going to help stabilize prices in Ontario. It's going to secure three decades of emissions-free power at a very affordable price of just 7.7 cents per kilowatt hour on average going into the grid.

The planning framework that enabled this success needs a refresh, and that's going to take place in Bill 135. An affordable, clean supply mix is central to our planning. That has recently been reflected in the IESO's first competitive procurement for renewable energy contracts. Last month, the IESO announced that this successful first round would come in at an average price of 8.5 cents per

kilowatt hour, which is comparable to conventional generation, and will include 13 projects, or 80% of the total projects, with significant aboriginal or First Nation participation. And 75% of these 16 projects had local community support, Speaker.

So yes, the world of energy and electricity is changing at an accelerated pace. That's what Bill 135 is all about. What's incredibly significant about our renewable achievements of local support and lower prices is that, compared to the forecasts in our 2013 long-term energy plan, our system now benefits from \$3.3 billion in savings, saving the average consumer \$1.67 per month on their electricity bill, thanks to renewables. This is a significant change in how we procure renewable power in Ontario and sets a strong benchmark for the future of energy planning in this province, one that includes nuclear, renewables, water power and natural gas.

All of these decisions and actions taken by our government to drive cost pressures down, to ensure reliable supply and transmission and to transform our system from one dependent on coal to one free of it relate directly to the legislation we are considering here today.

If passed, this act would establish in law a long-term energy planning process that is transparent, efficient and able to respond to changing policy and system needs, and also, very critically, enable to change a plan and adjust quickly to the accelerated innovation that we're seeing across the energy and electricity sector. This is consistent with our government's commitment to enhance transparency and community participation through open data, open dialogue and open government initiatives.

0920

This act would also support increased competition and enhanced ratepayer value by empowering the Independent Electricity System Operator to competitively procure transmission projects. This is important because previously, there was a regimen that allowed, for example, Hydro One to initiate transmission projects and to implement them. We now have implemented a competitive process where the IESO will open up transmission implementation to all players in these sectors.

This act would also introduce two new initiatives to help Ontario families and businesses conserve energy and water to help manage costs at both the retail customer level and the system as a whole.

First, it would require owners of large buildings to track their buildings' energy and water use and greenhouse gas emissions over time, to allow owners and renters to determine how a building's energy performance is changing and how it compares to similar buildings.

Second, it would set water efficiency standards for products such as appliances that consume both energy and water, like dishwashers and washing machines, allowing Ontarians to make the best choices for themselves when shopping for appliances.

We are not reinventing the wheel here with these two initiatives. Both of these initiatives follow best practices in a significant number of jurisdictions in Canada, the US and the United Kingdom.

This legislation would protect the long-term energy planning principles that developed the 2010 and 2013 long-term energy plans to ensure that future plans are developed consistent with the principles of cost-effectiveness, reliability, clean energy, early community and indigenous people's engagement, with much more attention to innovation, new technologies and climate change.

Our government knows that sound, prudent, long-term energy planning is essential to a clean, reliable and affordable energy system. The best way to ensure that kind of robust system planning occurs is to consult with the public, indigenous communities, industry and the energy stakeholder community. The proposed legislation includes a role for the Ontario Energy Board and the Independent Electricity System Operator in facilitating the implementation of cabinet-approved principles.

In essence, the proposed legislation would give the government the ability to set goals and objectives for the energy sector, but only after consideration of independent technical information on the sector from the IESO and after broad and substantive consultations with the public, stakeholders and aboriginal communities. Once the long-term energy plan has been developed, the IESO and the Ontario Energy Board would be responsible for independently executing and implementing that plan.

The proposed act would ensure that energy planning is conducted in a transparent manner consistent with the government's open dialogue initiative, requiring that the government undertake consultations with the public and relevant stakeholders and consider the results of those consultations when developing the long-term energy plan. This would build on the model of the comprehensive public consultation and engagement already undertaken with consumers, stakeholders and First Nation and Métis communities as part of the 2013 long-term energy planning process.

For the 2013 long-term energy plan, the comprehensive engagement included a number of stakeholder sessions and public town halls which took place in over a dozen communities across the province. More than 1,000 formal submissions were considered, and the ministry received about 8,000 responses to an online survey.

This act would enshrine in legislation the kind of planning process that the ministry used to develop the 2013 long-term energy plan. There is more work to be done, and having an energy planning process that is more open, transparent and responsive to changing times and innovation will help us to continue to build on our achievements.

We are anxious to get moving with this legislation to ensure that open, consultative planning continues to be the watchword of this government. We have heard often from opposition critics that a reliable and affordable electricity system is essential for a strong and competitive economy.

I'd like to conclude this morning by briefly reviewing the strong economic results that energy planning in this province has directly supported.

Ontario's GDP is currently 2.9%. Tied with British Columbia, we are together leading the country. TD Economics has just released its updated forecasts for the country. It projects that Ontario's GDP growth will be 2.9% in 2016, 0.7% higher than we projected in our 2016 budget released just a short while ago.

Ontario has gained 22,500 jobs in the last three months and 85,000 jobs since this time last year, with 90% of those jobs, Speaker, being full-time jobs and 76% being in above-average wage-earning industries.

Our job recovery rate since the great recession is 224%, well outpacing the United States at 161%.

Speaker, we hear the opposition alleging that job losses are resulting from bad energy planning, but the converse is the reality. Good energy policies contribute to a healthy economy and to job creation.

It should not be a surprise that Ontario has been named number one in North American jurisdictions for foreign direct investment for a second year in a row. Investors and companies from around the world are voting for Ontario with their chequebooks. That's the bottom line. Our unemployment rate is 6.8%, well below the national unemployment rate of 7.1%.

Ontario's combined federal and provincial corporate tax rate is the second-lowest of all North American jurisdictions. Together with a reliable, clean, affordable and well-planned electricity sector, Ontario is a magnet to attract investors. So it should come as no surprise that Moody's rating agency has recently upgraded Ontario's rating because of our strong economy, cost containment, and positive deficit reduction results.

Ontario made a choice to continue to invest in people, in infrastructure and in a robust energy sector and to take a little longer to get back to balance. That is why today, Ontario is right up there with British Columbia, leading Canada in economic growth, job creation and exports.

I encourage all members of this House to focus on moving this legislation forward, to securing an open and engaging process for energy planning. Together, we will continue to build Ontario up, to build our local and regional economies and, most importantly, to build a better and carbon-free future for our kids and grandkids.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to begin this morning by thanking the Minister of Energy for his leadership in helping to rebuild and strengthen Ontario's energy system. We are extremely fortunate to have in Ontario a strong mix of reliable sources for our energy needs. This enormously complicated file requires someone steady and wise at the helm, and this minister is definitely both. He is leading Ontario transformation to a clean, green, reliable and affordable future, and for this he deserves our admiration and our thanks as one of the best public servants to hold this portfolio in the history of our province. I thank him for his diligence and his leadership.

Due to his and this government's efforts, Ontario has come so far in building a clean, reliable and diverse

energy system. That is why I am pleased to rise today in support of the third reading of Bill 135, the Energy Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016.

Madam Speaker, the current legislative process for energy and electricity planning is burdensome, slow, unresponsive to the changing environment of the energy sector, and unnecessarily costly. That's exactly why our government has proposed a new process which would be able to respond in a timely manner to the emerging policy, program and technology needs that have the potential to make our system stronger and more focused on consumer needs. It would reduce process red tape that can bog down effective planning and reflect a more integrated approach to planning, consultation and implementation. But mostly, Speaker, this is a tried and tested process, one used already in the development of both the 2010 and 2013 long-term energy plans.

Now we have the opportunity to replace the outdated system officially with a planning process that works, both across government and with and among our stakeholders—and it has been embraced, I should note, by them.

0930

The act would bring about improvements in three areas.

First, it would establish in the law a long-term energy planning process that is transparent, efficient and able to respond to changing policy and system needs.

Second, it would support increased competition and enhanced ratepayer value by empowering the Independent Electricity System Operator, or IESO, to competitively procure transmission projects.

Third, it would introduce two new initiatives to help Ontario families, businesses and our province as a whole conserve energy and water to manage costs.

Let's begin with the long-term energy planning process. This government recognizes that sound, prudent long-term energy planning is essential to a clean, reliable and affordable energy future. This goal is being achieved through the implementation of the 2013 long-term energy plan, more commonly known as the LTEP. In fact, the 2013 LTEP was the biggest, most open and comprehensive consultation in ministry history and an early leading example of the principles of open government.

To give you some more background, the 2013 LTEP was designed to balance five principles that guide all of our decisions: cost-effectiveness, reliability, clean energy, community engagement and putting conservation first. For the past two-plus years, we have been rolling out a variety of initiatives under the plan, and it will continue to guide our efforts. The overarching theme throughout the LTEP, and the guiding principle of the plan, is that commitment to putting conservation first.

The 2013 LTEP reinforced this government's commitment to conservation. In fact, it set a long-term conservation target of 30 terawatt hours in 2032. This target represents a 16% reduction in forecast gross demand for electricity, the equivalent of more than all of the power used in 2013 by the city of Toronto alone. The 2013

LTEP also set a goal of meeting 10% of peak demand using demand response by 2025.

Energy efficiency will also help us with another key priority: Meeting the objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through this government's Climate Change Action Plan. The Ministry of Energy is making progress in implementing conservation first by launching electricity and natural gas conservation frameworks. Both frameworks are long-term commitments to support the delivery of conservation programs and are aligned to promote collaboration of conservation efforts among electricity and natural gas utilities.

It's important to understand that what is being accomplished on conservation is all driven by the commitments laid out in the LTEP. It is the guiding document and process for the Ministry of Energy, its agencies and the broader energy sector. A high degree of thought and care goes into planning the energy system for the future, including efforts to reduce costs and complexity. Quite simply, this means prioritizing the reliability of our energy supply and making the requisite investment in our energy system. It means thinking beyond the four-year election cycle and planning for the longer term, to ensure that Ontario businesses and residents have the reliability that has become the hallmark of this government's energy policy.

Effective planning also means securing input, and our government is committed to stakeholder and public participation in energy system planning. With this in mind, the province has refined a planning process which is efficient, responsive to changing policy and system needs, and supported by robust stakeholder consultations.

Under the proposed legislation, the IESO technical report is a starting point, a launching pad for stakeholder consultations. Developing the LTEP is a highly collaborative process in which the Ministry of Energy directly engages with stakeholders, indigenous communities and the public. The feedback from consultations and engagements would then be considered in the development of the plan itself. The ministry, with support from its agencies, would then be responsible for preparing the LTEP based on the data provided by the IESO and feedback received through consultations.

The LTEP would include specific goals and objectives for Ontario's energy system and would require cabinet approval before it is issued to the public. Cabinet would also issue directives to the IESO and the Ontario Energy Board asking for implementation plans from both to meet the plan's goals and objectives.

Both the IESO and the Ontario Energy Board would then develop their respective implementation plans outlining frameworks on how best to implement the government's objectives and requirements as set out in the plan.

These implementation plans would be subject to the Minister of Energy's approval. Once the minister has reviewed and approved the implementation plans, the IESO and the OEB would proceed with procurements and developing programs or policies as outlined in their prospective implementation plans.

While this series of checks and balances might seem and feel as though it is very process-oriented, as the saying goes, “Fail to plan, plan to fail.” Getting the plan right is critical.

In support of open government, open dialogue and open data, Bill 135 would require consultation in a variety of forums and mediums when developing LTEPs and would require publication of key background information and data used in their development.

The report would be similar to the technical report that the IESO will be developing on the electricity sector under proposed legislation.

Speaker, as you can see, the built-in consultation in this process is impressive. As I said before, the preparation of the plan, the 2013 LTEP, involved the biggest, most open and comprehensive consultation in Ministry of Energy history, and was an early leading example of following the principles of open government. Opening up the process not only ensures greater input; it also enhances understanding of the enormous complexities that are inherent in the energy system process.

Consultations included 12 regional sessions; round-table discussions with over 600 stakeholders, including evening open houses so the public could participate, and, excitingly, 300 members of the public did so; and 10 indigenous engagement sessions, meetings with a total of about 275 participants from over 100 First Nations and Métis communities and organizations.

An academic-focused innovation session, in development with the Mowat Centre, was held to discuss best leading-edge practices in conservation, community energy planning, emerging technologies and ensuring grid resiliency.

The Ministry of Energy also heard from individuals, municipalities, industry associations, businesses, non-government organizations, First Nations and Métis communities and other groups.

The ministry received more than 1,200 EBR submissions, 2,000 emails through letter-writing campaigns and close to 8,000 questionnaire responses. All of this has shaped our plan moving forward, Madam Speaker.

The Ministry of Energy went to these communities, and senior officials met face to face with thousands of people. This is meaningful consultation, not conducted in some closed-door boardroom. The LTEP consultation process is a very public one.

One initiative that has resulted from the LTEP planning process is the Ontario Energy Report and website. This quarterly report brings together approximately 60 datasets from across Ontario’s energy sector and makes them available to everyone—an excellent example of transparency and open government in action.

Over the 2010 and 2013 LTEP rounds, the LTEP planning process has proven itself an effective means of establishing the government’s key goals and priorities for our province’s energy system. Again, the effectiveness of this planning process is yet another reason why the government is proposing a statutory basis for long-term energy planning that would build on the 2010 and 2013

processes. This plan would make consultation with the public, stakeholders, First Nations and Métis groups throughout Ontario a requirement in the development of energy plans moving forward, as well as ensuring that energy plans and their supporting technical data are made public.

There has been a lot of support for Ontario’s leadership in energy planning and setting a standard for openness and transparency in the process. Many positive comments were shared by stakeholders during public committee hearings for this bill. I can tell you that in my own riding of Burlington, where a good cross-section of the nuclear energy supply chain is resident, there is broad support for the minister’s leadership, the hard work of his officials and the steady hand that is guiding the helm of the long-term energy planning process.

Indeed, Chris Hughes, the CEO of Laker Energy, a company in my riding and a supplier engaged in the Bruce nuclear refurbishments, has said publicly that this is the best energy minister he has worked with in the history of his career.

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He is not alone in his praise of the important work that our government and this ministry is doing. For example, Deputy Grand Chief Derek Fox of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation said:

“Bill 135 is a clear recognition that energy has far-reaching political, economic, social and environmental impacts—all of which are critical to NAN and the 49 First Nations it represents.

“Bill 135 clearly establishes the requirement to consult with First Nations” of NAN, and, in acknowledging that First Nations must be consulted, that we “must be an active participant and beneficiary of Ontario’s energy industry.”

Also, David McFadden, chair of the Ontario Energy Association, said:

“I’ll outline a few of the reasons why we think Bill 135 is important.

“First, and perhaps most importantly, it provides clarification on how energy planning will proceed in the future in this province. Predictability is very important for the energy sector, as you well know, because energy projects are often capital-intensive and require long lead times for development and construction....

“Energy infrastructure is vital to our province’s economic prosperity and to our standard of living. Proper planning is essential. By spelling out when and how energy planning will be done, Bill 135 greatly improves the ability of energy companies to do business in Ontario and provides Ontario’s citizens and businesses with reliable and sustainable energy supplies.”

He continued: “Bill 135 also makes some specific positive changes to the role of the Independent Electricity System Operator. In particular, Bill 135 adds electricity storage and transmission projects to the IESO’s procurement authorities. The proposed IESO procurement mechanisms will improve the integration of renewable power into Ontario’s energy system while encouraging new,

competitive entry into Ontario's storage and transmission businesses.

"If any of you participated in the 2013 LTEP," he continued, "then much of this will sound familiar, and that's because the government did an unprecedented job in developing the plan, consulting with our industry and the public, and working closely with the IESO to get the facts right."

The second change proposed in this bill is a change to transmission planning and procurement. Electricity transmission system planning is the responsibility of the IESO and involves assessing need and timing for new transmission infrastructure. Key bulk system transmission projects may be identified in the proposed LTEP process that I just described. Currently, the IESO can procure generation assets and electricity capacity, but it does not have the authority to undertake procurement for transmission. The legislation would provide the IESO with this ability, and it will allow for it to undertake competitive processes for transmitter selection or procurement, where appropriate.

A shift to a competitive procurement approach to transmission reflects the increasing role of the private sector in the transmission system with all of the inherent efficiencies this brings, and will ensure ratepayers receive the best value when investments are made to upgrade the system. And those need to be made, make no mistake. To suggest otherwise is to imperil our system and it would mean a return to the brownouts that were a hallmark of our past.

The IESO is well positioned to undertake the selection or procurement processes. If passed, Bill 135 would empower the Independent Electricity System Operator to undertake competitive selection or procurement of transmission where appropriate, leading to enhanced affordability.

The third change under Bill 135 relates to energy conservation. Conservation is one of the five pillars of Ontario's long-term energy plan, along with cost-effectiveness, reliability, clean energy and community engagement. Conservation is the cleanest and most cost-effective energy resource. It helps families and businesses save money on their energy bills and reduces the need to build expensive energy infrastructure. Conservation also reduces greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, creating a cleaner future for our children and grandchildren. It builds on our investments in the system, which saw us transition from dirty coal to a cleaner energy future, the single most transformative clean energy decision in North America. Fewer smog days and hospital admissions have been the powerful legacy of that investment, and as an asthmatic, I'm grateful for both of those.

As the government plans our energy needs for the next 20 years, conservation will be the first resource considered before building new generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure, wherever cost-effective. When you consider the potential for large-scale electrification, making the most of our existing resources and achieving maximum efficiency becomes doubly important.

Ontario has already made great strides in building a culture of conservation. From 2005 to 2014, Ontarians conserved 9.9 terawatts of electricity, enough to power the cities of Ottawa and Windsor in 2014. As mentioned earlier, the electricity conservation target is 30 terawatt hours by 2032. We are also aiming to use demand response to meet 10% of peak demand by 2025.

Bill 135 introduces two new initiatives that would help Ontario families, businesses and our province as a whole conserve water and energy and manage costs. The first of these mechanisms is the energy and water reporting and benchmarking initiative for large buildings. If this legislation is passed, the energy and water reporting and benchmarking initiative for large buildings would help building owners identify opportunities to save energy and water, thereby saving money on their utility bills. It would also help tenants and buyers make informed property decisions, enabling property and financial markets to value energy- and water-efficient buildings. It would help Ontario, too, to meet its conservation and greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Buildings accounted for 19% of Ontario's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2013. This means that large building owners can play an important role in helping Ontario meet its conservation and greenhouse gas reduction objectives. The new legislation would enable a requirement for property owners of large buildings that are 50,000 square feet and above to track their building's energy and water use, as well as greenhouse gas emissions, over time to determine how a building's energy performance is changing over time and how it compares to similar buildings, giving businesses the tools they need to remain competitive and save money, too.

Ontario is already demonstrating leadership through energy reporting and benchmarking requirements for government and broader public sector buildings. Extending this requirement to large commercial buildings would align our policy with jurisdictions across the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom and Asia, which is all very critical and important in the global economy that we operate in.

The second one is setting water efficiency standards for energy-using products. Ontario already has the most stringent efficiency requirements in Canada for a number of products. The Ministry of Energy has been regulating the energy efficiency of products and appliances for more than 25 years. Bill 135 proposes to add the water efficiency standards for energy-consuming products initiatives. To maintain Ontario's leadership role in regulating energy efficiency and to fully harmonize efficiency requirements, as I mentioned earlier, with leading North American jurisdictions, the Ministry of Energy is proposing to regulate the water efficiency of products and appliances that consume both water and energy, such as dishwashers and washing machines. Products that meet both energy and water efficiency requirements use less energy.

Currently, manufacturers can supply the Ontario market with models that meet our energy efficiency require-

ments but consume more energy than they would if we also included water efficiency standards. Other jurisdictions, including the province of British Columbia and the US Department of Energy, regulate both energy and water efficiency standards for these products. By harmonizing with the US standards for these products, Ontario can streamline the process for manufacturers, save consumers money and show continued leadership in setting efficiency standards.

Adding water efficiency standards to the existing energy efficiency regulation would streamline requirements for manufacturers and increase opportunities for consumers to choose a more efficient product. We are, Speaker, empowering consumers with this initiative.

During the committee public hearings for this bill, we heard positive reactions from several stakeholders, including from the Building Owners and Managers Association, the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, the Real Property Association of Canada and companies working in the energy efficiency sector. Brian Purcell, director of policy and programs at the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, said, “We really encourage the province to move forward with that type of policy, and we’re encouraged to see it as part of the package of legislative updates to the Green Energy Act that are part of Bill 135.”

Bala Gnanam, director of sustainability and building technologies with the Building Owners and Managers Association, said, “As a major stakeholder in the province’s commercial real estate industry, we are fully supportive of any initiative aimed at promoting building performance and environmental stewardship. We also welcome the minister’s customer-centric approach to the province’s long-term energy plan.”

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Brooks Barnett, manager of government relations, said: “We view this bill in its entirety as a major enabler of enhanced energy management and improved communication of key industry trends. The overarching theme throughout Ontario’s long-term energy plan is the commitment to put conservation first. We believe that these proposals are indicative of the government’s commitment to energy conservation in Ontario.

“In this, Ontario has a chance to lead by example.”

To sum up, Madam Speaker, the planning of the 2013 long-term energy plan was based on both a wide range of datasets and the most comprehensive consultation in Ministry of Energy history. By enshrining this planning process in legislation, this will ensure that we have the best information and planning for Ontario’s energy future and that the process is transparent and the data is made available to inform the public and the process.

The ministry and government have worked so hard to finally be here in the Legislature and are so close to solidifying the act. If passed, Bill 135 means an open, transparent and highly collaborative future, with energy planning that is conducted in a manner consistent with the government’s open-dialogue initiative. It would continue to build on the comprehensive public consultation and engagement already undertaken with consumers,

stakeholders and aboriginal communities as part of the 2013 long-term energy planning process, more commonly known, of course, as LTEP.

In conservation, if passed, the new legislation would give Ontarians the information we need to make smart energy decisions about the products we use and the places we live and work. As more Ontarians want to conserve energy, we are empowering them to do so, which is a really important next step. The new knowledge would help people manage their energy bills, help businesses remain competitive and create jobs, and help our province reach its conservation and greenhouse gas emission goals as well.

From conservation first to helping consumers, businesses and industries save money and nuclear refurbishment, the Ministry of Energy is at the forefront of projects that matter to people. The top priority will always be ensuring that Ontario’s electricity needs are met in a sustainable manner. Developing renewable energy sources and fostering a culture of conservation are cornerstones of Ontario’s balanced plan to provide clean and reliable energy while encouraging the development of a clean energy economy for our future. Our efforts today will have benefits lasting for many years and many generations to come.

Speaker, I look forward to seeing how this act, if accepted, will make that future happen, and I encourage all members of this House to support this cleaner, carbon-free future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, you caught me a little by surprise. I didn’t think they were going to end quite so early. But I was up all night preparing remarks anyway to respond to the Minister of Energy and the member from Burlington.

I only have a couple of minutes here, but I’m just going to start by saying—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I need to remind the member that we address each other by the riding or “the minister.” I just want to be very clear. You know the rules.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I didn’t call anyone by name. I said “the member from Burlington.”

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): No, you addressed the minister by his first name. Let’s remember that the rules of the House are that you address each other by riding or the minister’s title.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker.

I get now the Liberals’ new austerity program. They brought back Bill 135. I got it from the table, and it says, “First reading October 28, 2015.” Do you know why there was no reason to bring back one that said “second reading”? Because, Speaker, the bill came back in exactly the same form that it came here in first reading. How perfect have the Liberals gotten? They brought forth a bill in October of 2015 and took it to committee. We heard from stakeholders from all across the province

from every sector, from the energy sector, from the environment, Greenpeace and everybody else who wanted to see significant amendments to this bill. Thirty-four amendments were proposed to this bill, many by the third party, the NDP—I'm pleased to see the critic for the third party; I can't say his name, but he's the member for Danforth—and myself. We proposed many amendments. Not one was accepted.

I hope I get a chance to speak to this again, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity, and I appreciate the recognition by the energy critic for the opposition.

This is a bill that will be condemned for years to come. This is a bill that will be condemned in the same way that the fire sale of Hydro One has been and will be condemned. This is a bill that will be condemned in future inquiries into energy scandals in this province without a doubt. They'll say, "Where did all this come from?" Trace it back to the roots. The roots were in this bill, which set up the Minister of Energy, no matter who that person, as the energy czar for Ontario.

This bill substantially reduces the accountability of the minister and the Ministry of Energy. This bill locks out the public. This bill makes sure that the ability of those who are critical of an electricity plan are not able to actually put decision-makers and researchers on a witness stand and cross-examine them under oath to determine the validity of any particular evidence that's put forward.

I expected a variety of defences from this government on this bill. The one I had not expected, the one I didn't prepare for, was the argument that this bill is simply a codification of the practices that have led to so many successes with the energy policy of this government in this province. That, I had never expected. There was not a word from the member from Burlington or the Minister of Energy about the \$1.5 billion in surplus power that we have to dump on electricity markets outside Ontario every year—\$1.5 billion, and we get back pennies on the dollar. It's a burden on electricity payers, families, businesses across this province, and that's not even to mention smart meters or the gas plant scandal. This bill is a disaster.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm pleased to stand today and make some responses in support of Bill 135. I would like to focus on a couple of comments that have been brought forward by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the member from Toronto–Danforth.

I'm not seeing this bill as has been described by the opposition. I don't see this as a new austerity program. I feel compelled that we need to point out and continue to reiterate that we have been leaders in our approach to energy: not only in Canada but in North America. The first jurisdiction to eliminate coal-fired plants is something to be proud of—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Can we stop the clock? I'm going to remind the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm having a conversation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): No, no. There's no cross-talk. It's very disrespectful. There is a member speaking right now. I just want to remind the member: The next time I stand up, it will be a warning. And you remember that today there are some votes. Okay?

I'm going to return to the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and well done.

If we're going to talk about our energy minister as the energy czar, I think that it's incredibly important we acknowledge the work that has been done. The simple fact of removing coal-fired energy plants from our province has meant that we have had zero smog days—zero.

My brother—my family—has been profoundly affected by this. He has very serious asthma, and he's only one of many, many people in the province who are benefiting from this change. We need to acknowledge that. We need to recognize that we have been leaders in North America in making this change, and that is something to be proud of.

1000

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments on Bill 135, An Act to amend several statutes and revoke several regulations in relation to energy conservation and long-term energy planning, and comment on the speech from the Minister of Energy and others.

I thought I was living in another province when I was listening to the Minister of Energy's speech, because he was talking about how affordable electricity prices are and all of the wonderful things that the government is doing to make electricity more affordable. He was talking about kilowatt hours and how competitive our prices are for individuals and industry compared to other provinces and states. I have to say that certainly my experience in opening my hydro bill each month does not relate in any way to the minister's speech. It's just another world.

I'll give an example: Last Friday, I attended the Parry Sound Municipal Association meeting, a meeting I try to get to every year. I walked in and saw some seniors gathering. They were actually preparing the lunch for the municipal meeting. I walked in to say hi to them, and what's first thing they said to me? They said, "What's going on with electricity prices?" That was the first thing they said. Most people open their electricity bill with trepidation because they just wonder how expensive it's going to be each month. That is the reality, certainly in rural Ontario.

I think what this government needs to do is focus on affordability of electricity and get away from their crazy policies so people can afford to live in this province. Last

week in private members' business we were talking about building wind turbines two nautical miles away from Collingwood airport and Stayner airport. That is insane. That is what this government's policy is allowing. As a pilot, that's crazy, and that demonstrates a lot of your energy policies in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Not surprisingly, Speaker, there's a number of points of view on this legislation but I have to tell you, as I said in my remarks earlier this morning, I couldn't be prouder of the long-term planning that our government is investing in to provide a predictable future for Ontarians and to provide businesses and organizations in this province with the kind of processes they need to invest in technology. We're looking at long-term energy savings and conservation, which, quite frankly, doesn't get a lot of airtime because it's not, I suppose, a terribly sexy word. Nonetheless, it's incredibly important.

This legislation will enable a conservation planning framework and imbed it. It was also imbedded—I'm surprised this didn't get commented on by the opposition because they like to talk about open government, as do we. As a hallmark of the open government process, this will imbed consultation in the long-term energy processes—significant consultation with stakeholders from the energy sector, consumers, ratepayers, businesses of all sizes and our First Nations people.

You heard me quote in my remarks the head of NAN, the grand chief, talk about the importance of engaging our First Nations peoples, our indigenous peoples, in this important conversation, and of recognizing implicitly that they need to and should benefit from our long-term energy planning.

All in all, I hope that when it comes to a vote on this important legislation, the opposition gives ear to the importance of creating for our government the long-term energy planning processes that are inherent in making good decisions, whether it comes to conservation, saving Ontarians money or ensuring that we have fewer smog days and a cleaner and greener energy future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm going to clarify the comments to the member from Kingston and the Islands. I didn't imply that there was an austerity program in this bill. What it amounts to is the austerity program of this government in just bringing back bills unamended, which means they don't even have to print them again to bring them back to the House. That's about as much as they've done to save money in this province: ignoring what has been said to them at committee by many, many stakeholders through a broad section of this province. It's just people who are involved in the energy business, such as the Ontario Energy Association, which proposed some very, very noteworthy and well-considered amendments to this bill. But environmental groups such as Greenpeace were also very concerned about the concentration of power in the minister's office.

In this province, does anybody remember the gas plant scandal? Oh, excuse me. Nobody's ever going to forget it, because it cost you over \$1 billion. Even though the Liberals got up and said it was going to be a \$40-million mess, it turned out to be 25 times that—an over-\$1-billion scandal, one of the greatest scandals in this province's history.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And the member for Davenport—we never heckled the minister once during their speeches, but now, Speaker, you're allowing that kind of stuff to go on. Get control of this place, please.

She wants to go on that the opposition parties would have cancelled the gas plants too. The opposition parties wouldn't have built them there in the first place. That's the problem. You didn't listen to the people when you decided to build them there, and when the pressure got too hot, when the heat got too hot for you people—you were afraid of losing seats in the 2011 election—you decided to cancel—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, I'm hearing lots of shouting and making statements. Can we stop the clock? I want to remind the members that the member from Renfrew has the floor, okay? So let's be respectful in this debate. I know there will be colourful language. I'm going to return back to the member. If I hear any more shouting and innuendo, you will be warned.

The member from Renfrew.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's wonderful to be able to get up here and, hopefully, be able to get through my remarks without being disturbed by the heckles from the other side.

The minister then ignored the views of the people, went ahead and decided where those plants were going to go. Then when the heat got too much, the Premier at the time, Dalton McGuinty, decided to cancel the gas plants.

It seemed like, "Oh, it's \$40 million. It's not the end of the world." But they weren't being honest when they said it was \$40 million, and an investigation proved that. The auditor proved that—\$1.1 billion.

So let's see what it turned out to be. They cancel a gas plant in Oakville. Now they've had to—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to remind the member we're debating Bill 135. Stick to Bill 135.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is about Bill 135, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): No—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's about the minister's power under Bill 135.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You are going to stick to Bill 135 in your comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, I listened to the minister for an hour, and he barely talked about Bill 135. He talked about energy rates.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I just need to remind the member: You are going to debate, in your comments, Bill 135.

Mr. John Yakubuski: On a point of order, Speaker: I listened to the minister—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. You're going to ask for a point of order?

Mr. John Yakubuski: Yes, I am. I would expect that the treatment for the members on the opposite side would be the same as the government side. The minister spoke about all kinds of different energy programs that had nothing to do with Bill 135. We never interrupted, and he was allowed to do so.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On the same point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member for Niagara West.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It seems to me that in Bill 135, the Energy Statute Law Amendment Act, the whole thing has to deal with how the Minister of Energy is going to treat issues and establish a level of trust in the new powers of the minister—whether the minister will use them appropriately. I do think the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke respectfully has a very fair point here in terms of why the opposition is not supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I just want to remind the member to stay as close to the bill as possible.
1010

Mr. John Yakubuski: I am doing that, Speaker, very closely, because this is about the power of the minister. But in order to establish why we are so opposed to this bill, we have to talk a little bit about the history of the Ministry of Energy and what they did to this province, costing us \$1 billion—shameful.

Let's go back to that. The minister then cancelled the plants. Now we've got a situation where we're building transmission lines from Sarnia down to Oakville, from Lennox down to Mississauga. Why? Because they decided they were going to cancel it for political reasons. As the Premier said herself, admitted herself, it was a political decision—a political decision. Political decisions aren't made by what used to be the OPA or the IESO. Political decisions are made by the politicians. That was a political decision that cost this province and its energy ratepayers over \$1 billion.

That was when the minister didn't have Bill 135 in his or her pocket, whoever the minister will be today, tomorrow and into the future. That was without Bill 135. Now this government, through the power of its majority, where it ran roughshod over us at committee, has decided that they don't want to retain the powers the minister had; they want to increase those powers so that the minister can actually ignore the best advice of the professionals at the IESO and the Ontario Energy Board. They can just take the OEB and the IESO, fold them into a little ball and toss them in the garbage, because they don't need to talk to them anymore. The minister is the supreme being. The minister will make the decisions.

They talk about consultation? That is a sham. We looked at that in the bill. Oh, yes, they're going to travel all over the province, just like they do on everything else. What about those pre-budget hearings that amounted to nothing? The minister had already written the budget,

and they were still out, going around the province: "Oh, what do you think we should do in the budget?" What a joke that was. So what do you think we're going to get on a consultation process throughout this province if Bill 135 passes?

You know what? I love the way they line up their supporters and get their quotes. When they're answering questions in the House, they'll have some group that will say, "Oh, this is the best thing since the invention of the wheel." And then they say, "See, everybody loves us." They even talk about that when it comes to hydro rates. They say, "Oh, look at Joe from wherever, Kalamazoo"—it might as well be Kalamazoo—"says that his hydro bill has gone down." So the Minister of Finance gets up in the House, saying, "Hydro rates are going down in the province of Ontario."

Now we're going to have Bill 135, where we don't just crown the minister; we make him the emperor of energy. Not the energy czar; that's not high enough. I hate to disagree with my friend from Toronto–Danforth, but "energy czar" is not a strong enough title. He's going to be the emperor of energy. He will just be able to ignore the sound advice of the professionals.

We had the Society of Energy Professionals—the professionals who run the plants, the professionals who run the system. It's highly unusual for them to come to a committee hearing and disagree with a minister of the crown, but they came to the hearings and said, "Don't proceed with this bill unamended. We cannot have that kind of power put into the hands of one person." Ignored.

I've got to say to my colleague from Toronto–Danforth, I was shocked, and I believe he was as well. I can't speak for him, but he is the member from Toronto–Danforth, and he is the energy critic for the third party. I believe he was as shocked as I was that none of our amendments were accepted by the government. They ask us: "Are you going to vote for this?" Are they crazy? We didn't vote for it the last time. They didn't make any changes. We won't be—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, seeing it is 10:15, we'll recess until 10:30.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased this morning to introduce three members from the Whitby–Oshawa riding: Michelle Makris, Sandra Kim Ferri and Diane Morton, who are in the gallery right here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to introduce this morning, in our lobby, the new northern development and mining representative, Marc Di Rosa. Good to have you with us, Marc.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to introduce Eli Preston and Danielle Preston, who are here at Queen's Park for the first time, visiting from the United States. Today is Eli's birthday. Please welcome them.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted today to invite all members to the Tibetan lunch—it's Tibet Day—on behalf of the Ontario Parliamentary Friends of Tibet. We also have, in the gallery, Mr. Phunstok Chomphel, Ms. Kalsang Dolker Gyaltzen, Miss Chime Lhamo, and the president of the organizations, Mr. Sonam Lankar. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'd like to introduce a few people: first, Sarah Cannon, who's the executive director of Parents for Children's Mental Health—it is Children's Mental Health Week—as well as Kim Moran, the CEO of Children's Mental Health Ontario. I think Angela Fowler is here with her as well. She's the director of strategic initiatives at Children's Mental Health.

I want to acknowledge some parents I met, parents of children with autism, whom I talked to briefly before question period. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In the members' gallery, I would like to welcome Fire Chief Chuck Parsons and his wife, Wendy, as well as Deputy Fire Chief Mike Bradt and his wife, Sandy. They are from the Leamington fire department in the great riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex. Welcome.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome a number of parents from Waterloo region who are here today to bring attention to the government's cuts to autism services: Sarah Jones, Laurie Shiffer, Amy Fee, Kathie Shaw, Laura Pastrok, Niveen Shrem, Kohar Kilejian, Kanika Kahmida, Tina Mach-Stevenson, Elizabeth Everest-Rendall, Jill Bernhard and Dana Pettis. Thank you for coming to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to introduce Gillian Rowatt, a fantastic member of my staff in my constit office. Welcome to Queen's Park, Gillian.

Mrs. Julia Munro: We are joined today by Ross and Korine Maclean, from my riding of York-Simcoe, who are here today in support of their daughter, Serenity, who has autism.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to welcome some guests today—families with autism. We have Nancy Marchese, Shiri Bartman, Tracie Linblad, Sharon Gabison, Laura and Bruce McIntosh, Kara Onofrio, Nancy Warren, Kristen Ellison, Diana Rojas, Kim Kirkos, Dax Giguere, Jill and Adriana Breugem, Penny Batey, Cliff McIntosh and Christina Charalambous. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to welcome Warren "Smokey" Thomas. The president of OPSEU is in the crowd this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park yet again, sir.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome Sue Jamjekian, her husband, Garo, and her two sons, Manny and Gabriel, who are visiting from the Quinte region today as part of the autism protest.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased today to welcome a school from my riding. G.L. Roberts collegiate is here. And the grade 10 civics classes? I taught them in grade 8, so welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Penny Batey, Cliff McIntosh, Clara McIntosh and Heather Wood, who are joining the autism rally later on today.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm really pleased to welcome our page captain, Laura Persichini. Her mother is here with us today in gallery: Mary Persichini. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Seated in the gallery this morning, I'd like to welcome the press gallery summer intern, Sindi Skenderi, in the Speaker's gallery. Sindi, welcome. She'll be working with the Queen's Park press gallery until September. A pleasure. Thank you for joining us.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is not only a personal friend but the Speaker of Manitoba, here in the Speaker's gallery with his wife. Their names are Daryl and Sheila Reid. Welcome, Mr. Speaker. I might add in terms of his service to his province that he is retiring. I want to thank him and wish him well in his future endeavours. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members will be aware that there appear on today's Orders and Notices paper two notices of opposition days to be debated next week. Under standing order 43(c), the Speaker is required to select one of those notices for consideration. I would like to advise the members that the motion by Ms. Horwath is the one that will be selected for debate next week.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm just wondering if there's been an optional statutory holiday declared for cabinet ministers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The member will know that that's not appropriate. He does know that, which also makes it a little less tolerant of my patience.

DEATH OF MEMBER'S SON

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's with sadness that I regret to inform the House that two evenings ago, Toby Barrett's son Brett died peacefully at home, surrounded by his family, after a three-month battle with cancer. Brett was just 31 years old. I know I speak on behalf of all members that our prayers and thoughts are with Toby and his family at this very difficult time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order and would echo his comments in that I know that all of us, when family is involved—in this circumstance, a friend of mine, as Toby is—I offer him my personal sadness.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I've told the Legislature the story of seven-year-old Joshua and his family from Oakville. You've heard about seven-year-old Warren from the Peterborough area. But you've taken no action to help them. The stories are countless. There is four-year-old Lila from Etobicoke, seven-year-old Wesley from Grimsby and four-year-old Adam from Mississauga. There's five-year-old Keith from Toronto and four-year-old Mason from Oshawa. This government has turned their back on all these young children.

IBI is effective after the age of five. Autism does not end at five. Why can't these children receive the IBI treatment they were promised? Why can't they receive the IBI treatment they deserve?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to reinforce that our thoughts are with Toby Barrett in this very sad moment.

The plan that we are putting in place, the \$333 million that will change the program in the province, is designed exactly to provide the kind of intense service for all of the children that the Leader of the Opposition has named. Right now, we have a situation where children are on a waiting list. They are not getting service. That is unacceptable to us. What we are doing is investing in those children, in those families, to make sure that they come off a waiting list into service, and that that service is tailored, that program is designed for those children, and they get exactly the level of intensity that they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Back to the Premier: A family in my riding is considering leaving the province to get the support their daughter needs. In their letter, they write:

"There are many people discussing moving province or country and we have the option for both. We own a manufacturing business. We operate here and we can move it if need be. We would have to leave our friends and family and our amazing school supports here in Dufferin.... Should we move now to save her?" These parents only want the best for their children and will do anything for them.

Premier, it's never too late to do the right thing. Will you reverse your decision and restore IBI therapy to children over five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the member for the important question, and again, I want to acknowledge the families that are here today.

I think we're in agreement, I would say to the critic from the opposition, that we want the best for these children. We want these children to reach their full potential. That is something I hear from parents all the time. I'm

meeting with parents on a continuous basis. Many of them have told us what this new program should look like. That feedback has been incorporated, but there are additional opportunities to hear parents' voices, and to hear children's voices, too, as this program transitions over the next couple of years.

I've met with the Ontario Autism Coalition and the alliance of parents for children with autism. They're giving us great feedback about how this program should move forward. I look forward to that continued dialogue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary. The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is back to the Premier. Premier, I want to tell you about Sue Jamjekian and her son Gabriel, who is six, who join us here in the Legislature today. Gabriel is on the autism spectrum. When he was younger, he was almost totally non-verbal. He had no vocabulary. He now speaks in full sentences, takes direction, and his outbursts are fewer and far between because he doesn't feel like he can't communicate.

Gabriel's brother Manny is also on the autism spectrum. Manny turns five later this year. Gabriel, in his mother Sue's words, is living proof that IBI at any age can change lives.

My question to the Premier is simple: Why is she abandoning kids like Gabriel and Manny? Why does she insist that autism ends at age five?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's important for me to say again in the House, especially with parents here today, that I do not believe that autism ends at age five. Our government doesn't believe that; I don't think anybody believes that.

The new program represents 16,000 additional spaces to be added, and wait-lists will be cut. The intent of the program is to ensure that children get the individual support they need, with the right intensity for the right duration.

It's important to note that children are not being removed immediately from treatment. There is a transition—and I acknowledge that transition can be challenging; absolutely. That's why it's important that I keep hearing from parents, I keep hearing from the experts and I keep hearing from the medical community and others to make sure, as we move through this process, that all voices are heard and we get this right.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Gila Martow: Again to the Premier: Two weeks ago, I reminded the Premier of her recent interaction with a teenager from my riding of Thornhill. The teenager spoke eloquently to the Premier at the end of an autism rally outside her constituency office. That teenager was Cliff McIntosh, who received IBI therapy after the age of five.

Does the Premier agree that IBI therapy is helpful after the age of five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I did speak with Cliff, and I acknowledge the families who are here.

Last week, I spoke with families with children with autism every day, and I understand, absolutely, that we need to make sure that young people get the intensity of therapy, the intensity of service that they need. That is exactly why we need to do what we're doing. Right now, those kids are not getting service. Some of them are not getting service at all, and those who are getting service are not getting the level of intensity that they need. That's why we are investing in this program. That's why this transition is important: so that young people, whatever their age, can get the therapy and service that they need that's tailored to their needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, this weekend you'll celebrate Mother's Day, but little Enzo's mom, Shawna, has never heard her own son say "I love you" and never heard even the single word "Mom." Five-year-old Enzo lives in Grimsby. He was diagnosed with autism, and he has been waiting for life-saving IBI therapy for two years. Enzo doesn't speak. He is aggressive. He has poor motor skills. And he's in fragile health because, as a result of his autism, he has a fear of most foods. All of this is treatable, but without IBI, Enzo's mom, Shawna, fears that it's too late for her son. It's a very treatable condition, but he'll be stuck there, potentially, for the rest of his life.

Premier, please don't deny Enzo's mom, Shawna, an opportunity to hear those four precious words: "I love you, Mom."

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we are making this change: because we don't want Enzo to continue to wait for service while the biological window closes, where that intensity of service can be of the most use.

Part of the \$333 million is being invested in early identification, because early identification, which we have heard from parents—quite frankly, I have heard from parents for years, from the time I was the Minister of Education, that we need more early intervention, and we need that to be more universal across the province. That early intervention, accompanied by tailored services that are the right intensity for the child, whether that child is age four or whether that child is age 11—that they get the intensity of service that they need. That's exactly what this program is designed to provide, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time for the member from Hamilton Mountain.

The member from Wellington—Halton Hills on the final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Back to the Premier: The government's answers to our questions on IBI funding seem to display a callousness in contradiction to a government which claims to care.

I have heard from Meghan Graham, who grew up in Elora and, years ago, was actually a legislative page here. Her son Daniel is autistic. Daniel needed, received and

benefited from IBI therapy from the ages of seven to nine, and he has made great strides. Daniel's mom has passionately made the case to me that all autistic children need to be able to access IBI therapy.

We need the Premier to stand up in this House, acknowledge that autism doesn't end at age five, and say, "We're going to find a way to eliminate these wait-lists and help all autistic children, including those older than five, to reach their full potential," and then work hard to bring truth to that statement. Why won't she do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, thanks to the opposition for the important question.

It's important to clarify that children who are currently receiving IBI are not being immediately removed from service. They will receive their clinical assessment at the regular six-month interval, Speaker, and a transition plan will be identified that's specific to their needs. So if they continue to need those kinds of intensive services, they will get intensive services. It will be more tailored and more customized for the right duration to meet that child's needs.

1050

I encourage the opposition to reach out to my office. I've shared information with the opposition on the facts of the new program. I do welcome opposition feedback; I appreciate the letters. I've talked to a number of them. It's important that we all have our facts straight. I worry a bit, Speaker, if the facts are not clear, so I'm very committed to helping the opposition get clarity on that.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Hundreds of parents are coming to Queen's Park today to fight for the autism services that their kids need. Many of these parents have already been to Queen's Park to rally on the lawn or to tell their stories in press conferences. Their children are being cut off from the waiting list. Schools are not ready for this change and neither are service providers. This is a recipe for chaos. Implementation of this program, this plan, has already gone off the rails.

There is no need to rush through bad policy. Will the Premier listen to these parents and cancel her plan to cut off IBI services for children over the age of five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just say to the leader of the third party that I completely agree with her that the implementation and the transition, for parents, is extremely important in this. I'm glad that she is focusing on that because it is extremely important that families know what the transition is. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that a number of the parents that I spoke to last week were saying that to me: that they weren't getting enough information. The minister is working on making sure that families get the information about when the assessment will take place and what the transition plan will be.

But we are not willing to leave children sitting on a waiting list not getting service when we know full well that getting service to those children earlier is what will help them in their immediate lives and in the long term. That's what this plan is about. But I agree with the leader of the third party that making sure that those transition plans are in place and that families know what is happening is paramount.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I find that very interesting, Speaker. Earlier this year, this Premier admitted that she made a mistake when she planned to nearly double the cost of prescriptions for Ontario seniors. It was the wrong decision. Today, there are hundreds of Ontario parents who are telling this government that cancelling IBI autism therapy for kids over five is wrong.

It is not just parents, though, Speaker—it is not just parents. It is the Ontario Public School Boards Association that is calling on the government to change its decision, as are educators, labour, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and the Ontario Autism Coalition. It's not too late for this Premier to do the right thing and show these children and their parents the respect that they deserve.

Will this Premier cancel her plan to cut off autism therapy for thousands of children that are currently on the waiting list?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Since we are talking about what's happening today, I thought I'd take a moment to explain the process and what is happening with families right now.

Every child who is receiving or is on a wait-list for IBI or ABA has been sent a letter from their service provider. Next week, service providers will start meeting with families who are transitioning from the wait-list; those are children over five who are on the IBI wait-list. Within 10 days of reviewing that situation, what we call an "eligibility agreement," those families will immediately receive \$8,000 so the children can come off the wait-list and into immediate service. All families should have completed those meetings by mid-June, and we'll be receiving very regular updates and reports from the service providers to make sure that's exactly what's happening. And I'll—

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The parents who are here today know that their children can benefit from IBI therapy, and they know what life will be like for their children—for them and their children—without IBI therapy.

Last month, Kristen Ellison came to Queen's Park and she shared her story; it was heart-wrenching, Speaker. She said, "Realizing I may never hear 'Mom, I love you' is enough to kill a mother inside." That's what she said.

Will this Premier look these kids in the eye, look these parents in the eye, and tell them how she can so callously cut their children off from this life-changing therapy?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker.

I just have to say that the Premier and I are both very committed to continuing the dialogue with parents and continuing the dialogue with the autism organizations to make sure that this is being implemented as smoothly as it can and in a supportive way for families.

It's important for me to continue to get that feedback. I'm doing that every day. I am very happy to meet with families. I have enjoyed very much meeting with the children as well to hear about how things are going for them, whether they're in school now, whether they will be going to school, whether they have some combination of school and private support. I think it's very important, and I am in discussions with the Minister of Education about that—children who are in school.

That dialogue needs to continue, and I am open to all advice.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Ontario's energy sector should have one objective: making sure families and businesses have reliable, affordable and clean energy. But the Liberals looked at the energy sector and said, "What can this do for the Liberal Party?" So they cancelled gas plants to save seats, they cancelled wind contracts to save seats and they cancelled OPG nuclear plans after getting \$100,000 from private nuclear companies. The Premier decided to sell off Hydro One and use that sell-off to help the Liberal Party fill its war chest.

Enough is enough, Speaker. Will this Premier do the right thing and call a commission of inquiry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, when we came into office, we had an unreliable electricity grid in Ontario. We have rebuilt and invested in more than 10,000 kilometres of line. We have shut down all of the coal plants in Ontario. We have no smog days in Ontario now. By doing that, we took the single most important action to reduce climate change in North America.

We have clean, renewable energy. We have an industry in Ontario that was jump-started because of our decisions to invest in and promote renewable energy. We have made a decision around building transit that is leading to the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One. I know the NDP doesn't support our investments in transit, but that's—

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

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: And we have electricity rates that families can't afford and that are driving business and industry out of this province. Congratulations to the Premier on that.

Yesterday, I asked the Premier about the fifth OPP anti-rackets investigation into her government. When

asked about cancelling this wind contract to save Liberal seats, the Premier said they “made a decision to gather evidence and to look at the research.” Actually, the OPP is investigating this situation because it’s alleged that the government wasn’t gathering evidence; it was deleting evidence—again.

The Premier insists that everything is just fine. Will she actually prove that by calling a commission of inquiry to ensure that the awarding and cancelling of energy contracts in this province isn’t corrupt?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It’s interesting that the leader of the third party talked about our economic situation and companies coming to this province. Ontario is one of the leaders in economic growth in this country. I don’t know what the leader of the third party is talking about, but we were the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment for two years in a row in North America. There’s something going on here that means that businesses are growing, expanding and coming to Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we made a decision on offshore wind power. There is decades of evidence in terms of research, as I said, in terms of land-based wind turbines. That same body of research does not exist for offshore. We are doing that research and we await the recommendations.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government has used Ontario’s energy system to abuse fundraising rules and fill the Liberal war chest. They have cancelled energy contracts to try to win seats. Energy policy should be about energy, not about political benefits for the Liberal Party.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Labour, come to order.

1100

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People deserve a system that works for them, not just for the Ontario Liberal Party.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Trinity–Spadina, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Will this Premier call a Charbonneau-type commission for Ontario, a commission of inquiry on the awarding and management of public contracts in the energy industry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, there are a number of issues that the leader of the third party has raised. She talked about fundraising, and of course she doesn’t want to talk about the substance of fundraising changes that we’re making. We’ve asked for input on draft legislation; she doesn’t want to talk about that.

The reality is that we made a decision. We made a decision in terms of offshore wind turbines. There is not the research that has been done on land-based wind turbines for offshore freshwater turbines—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We take our record-keeping responsibilities very, very seriously. We have changed the rules. There is training that has been done across government to make sure that records are retained in the way that they should be.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Premier. I have a constituent, Stephanie, from Cannington, whose son, Dax, has been on a wait-list for IBI since he was diagnosed with autism at two and a half years old. Dax has received ABA at a cost of \$20,000 out of his family’s own pockets, but after two years, Dax is still considered non-verbal and needs more intensive IBI therapy in order for him to communicate with his own mother.

Dax was getting close to the top of the list for IBI, where he could have had the therapy he needed in order to have a better future. But last month, Stephanie was told that her son was being removed from the wait-list because he is over five years old. But we all know that autism doesn’t end at five.

Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier think it is acceptable to shorten wait-lists by kicking children off?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for her question. It’s important to note that what is driving this change, Speaker, is not wait-list reduction. It’s about providing better service, at the right time and at the right intensity, for all children with autism.

This family is a good example of where, yes, he’ll be removed from that particular wait-list, but into immediate service with the \$8,000. Most of those children in that kind of situation are already on the ABA wait-list, so it should be a fairly quick and seamless transition to the new expanded program, where it will be more customized, it will be more intense and of longer duration for that child.

It’s important we convey how this is going to work. I expect the service providers will continue to provide that kind of information to the families as we go forward. If that’s not the case, I want to hear about it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Premier. For the last year a young constituent in my riding, Xavier, has received 30 hours of IBI therapy per week through the direct funding model. As of May 1, Xavier is no longer eligible for support because Xavier turned six and was determined to be too old for your government’s new model.

After years of paperwork, assessment and wait-lists, Xavier and other children like him in Sarnia–Lambton will now only have access to IBI therapy if their parents can afford the full cost. In Xavier’s case, that’s nearly \$11,000 per month.

Will you commit today, Premier, to rethink your plan so that children in Sarnia–Lambton like Xavier get the

therapy they would benefit from the most, not just the therapy they can afford?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for the question. This is a good example of a real situation where a child is in IBI currently. They are not being removed immediately from therapy; as I said earlier, they will have a clinical assessment at six months, and they may or may not taper off to the new program. It's going to depend on that clinical assessment, and it is up to the experts to assess that child and determine what the best path forward is for that child. The principle will always be that they get the right amount of service, the right intensity for the right duration.

I have heard the comment about direct funding, and again, I've been talking to the coalitions and the alliances and parents about those options going forward. I am open to that as we go forward to implement the program further.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Hundreds of parents of children with autism have once again come to Queen's Park to protest the Premier's decision to take away essential therapy from kids. They have been outside Liberal MPPs' offices. They have been blocked by Liberal MPPs on Twitter for simply requesting a meeting.

If taking away essential therapy from kids with autism is defensible, why won't the Liberal members meet with parents? Even the Liberal member from Beaches–East York—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I'd like to deal with somebody on this side. It's not helpful.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Exactly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Burlington, come to order. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order. There were a few others I had in my mind, but I was not allowed to do what I was going to do.

Finish your question, please.

Miss Monique Taylor: If taking away essential therapy from kids with autism is defensible, why won't these Liberal members meet with parents? Even the Liberal MPP—

Interjections.

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

Finish your question, please.

Miss Monique Taylor: It appears that the Liberal caucus is divided on this matter, Speaker. Some will have the spine to stand up for kids with autism, but most of them won't.

Knowing this, will the Premier slow down, do the right thing and immediately stop changes to autism services—

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that this issue is essentially a nonpartisan issue. I believe that this is about children who need more service.

I will say, if that's the tone that the third party and this member want to take, I know for a fact that members of my caucus are meeting with the people who come to their offices—all of them. I honestly don't think that it's befitting this discussion to take it to that level.

The reality is that we are looking for a solution. This is a complex issue. We are putting \$333 million in to solve this—

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

Supplementary, please.

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, they can say whatever they want, but there are snapshots and photographs of parents being blocked.

Kids with autism have been taken off the IBI wait-list. They're being told that they will have to wait for years to get this so-called "enhanced program." But nobody knows what the enhanced program even is.

Even the school boards are sounding the alarms, asking this government to rethink this decision. Apparently, the new program may include group therapy instead of one-on-one support. This is just plain wrong. Implementation has already been disastrous. It's really time to slow down.

Speaker, will the Premier look up at all the parents who are here today and tell them that she will do the right thing and stop her changes to autism services?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to talk about some of the work—

Miss Monique Taylor: Who were you elected to represent—Kids or the Liberals? Tell me.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're not helping.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If it continues, the member will be named.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain is named.

Miss Taylor was escorted from the chamber.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour, second time. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, second time. Oh, I've got a good memory.

This is from before, while I was waiting. I don't need to explain myself.

New question.

M. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour la procureure générale et la ministre responsable—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Forgive my interference; I forgot to finish the minister's answer.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, I was actually looking forward to giving the answer, Speaker.

We've actually invested \$77 million in school boards specifically for programs for children with autism. Our focus has been on strengthening the ABA capacity for school-age children. This has included targeted funding for ABA training at the Geneva Centre for Autism to train teachers' assistants—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Windsor West, come to order.

Please finish.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Since the summer of 2006, we've actually provided almost \$49 million to boards to hire and train professionals with ABA expertise to support principals, teachers and multidisciplinary transition teams. To date, more than 20,000 educators have been trained to prepare them to offer ABA support services in publicly funded school boards.

ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

M. Shafiq Qaadri: Maintenant, ma question est pour la procureure générale et la ministre responsable des Affaires francophones.

L'accès à la justice en français touche vos deux portefeuilles ministériels. Votre ministère a depuis de nombreuses années un plan stratégique dans le secteur de la justice qui a, en fait, été reconnu comme une pratique exemplaire par l'Office des affaires francophones, le commissaire aux services en français de l'Ontario et d'autres intervenants.

Le rapport de réponse du comité directeur de 2015 intitulé Améliorer l'accès à la justice en français, décrit des solutions qui ont été mises en oeuvre dans l'objectif d'améliorer les droits linguistiques en français de la population ontarienne.

Madame la Ministre, pourriez-vous partager avec la Chambre des exemples de solutions dans le rapport et les progrès accomplis pour soutenir l'accès à la justice en français en Ontario?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier le député d'Etobicoke-Nord pour sa question très intéressante.

Oui, notre gouvernement s'est engagé à faire la promotion des droits et services en français au sein du système de justice et à assurer que tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes aient un accès égal et approprié au système de justice de l'Ontario dans la langue officielle de leur choix.

Le droit à un procès en français et à une enquête préliminaire dans les affaires criminelles et à des

instances bilingues dans les affaires de droits civils sans jury, de droit de la famille, devant la Cour des petites créances et relevant de la Loi sur les infractions provinciales, existe partout en Ontario. Tous les tribunaux administratifs qui relèvent de la compétence de mon ministère tiennent des audiences bilingues sur demande.

Chaque année, des intervenants et des cadres supérieurs du ministère se réunissent pour établir les priorités dans le domaine des services en français et pour faire état des progrès accomplis. J'ai participé vendredi dernier à une réunion de mise—

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

Question supplémentaire?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: Je suis ravi de voir que le gouvernement fait tout ce qu'il peut pour améliorer l'accès à la justice en français pour les francophones de la province.

Je comprends que le ministère a commencé un projet pilote en partenariat avec les juges en chef de l'Ontario pour offrir des services en français au palais de justice d'Ottawa. Cela inclut un comité d'engagement communautaire juridique pour développer des stratégies dans le but de maximiser la présence de ce projet pilote. Les membres du système judiciaire et les membres du barreau d'Ottawa sont engagés dans ce comité.

Est-ce que la ministre peut nous en dire un peu plus à propos de ce projet?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: En effet, le député a raison. En mai 2015, j'ai été très fière de lancer ce projet pilote qui fournit un accès fluide et opportun à la justice en français au palais de justice d'Ottawa. En partenariat avec les juges en chef de l'Ontario, le projet pilote aide à réduire tout obstacle pour les parties, les avocats et les utilisateurs francophones du système judiciaire de l'Ontario à Ottawa.

En plus de ces services offerts en français, le projet offre davantage d'annonces bilingues au public, des renseignements juridiques sur les droits et les services en français affichés sur les écrans dans les palais de justice et davantage d'affichage indiquant que les services en français sont offerts sur place. Le projet pilote d'Ottawa nous aidera à cerner les pratiques exemplaires pouvant assurer l'amélioration de l'accès à la justice en français pour toute la population.

Alors, oui, vendredi dernier il y avait un rapport d'étape et j'y ai participé. Il y a un bel engouement pour offrir de plus en plus de services de justice en français en Ontario.

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

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. My constituent Valerie Brodrick's grandson is one of the children whose treatment you're withholding because he is five. In Valerie's words, "He has now been considered trash, unfixable because of his age. The provincial life-time buyout to parents of \$8,000 when therapy can cost

up to \$5,000 a year—is this what you call equality for children in Ontario?”

Mr. Speaker, this is inherently wrong. Families should not go bankrupt in order to pay for treatment for their child. This goes beyond just being a critical health issue. Withholding IBI treatment violates the child's rights.

I want to know: Will the Premier recognize IBI as medically necessary treatment and pay for it for all Ontario children who need it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for the question.

We know that wait times have increased, but more importantly, children who need services are not getting it. That's why we're making this investment. We are investing the 333 million new dollars on top of the \$190 million we spend each and every year on this program so that families don't have to wait longer.

We want to make sure they get into service and off wait-lists wherever possible. That's why, in this particular case, this child will be transitioned and the family will have the \$8,000. Then they will move up the wait-list for the new program and, hopefully, be at the top of that wait-list at the end of the \$8,000, and get the intensity and the duration of the services that they need to reach their full potential. That's my commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is also to the Premier. On Monday, I told this House about Lawson, a six-year-old with autism who is being cut off IBI. Today I'm rising on behalf of Xavier, a five-year-old from Oxford with autism. He has been on the waiting list for IBI since he was three years old. In January, he finally started receiving therapy. His mother says you cannot even express the emotional factor when her five-year-old spoke to her for essentially the first time. Then she got the devastating news that Xavier's IBI is being phased out immediately, because at age five, the government says, he's too old.

Will the Premier reconsider and give Xavier and other children like him the services they need and depend upon?

1120

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for his question.

My message to Xavier's family is that I want to make sure he gets the right support at the right time and that he has every potential to succeed in his life, whatever Xavier decides to do. It sounds like he's in therapy already; he will not be removed immediately from therapy.

As I said before, children who are in IBI therapy over the age of five will be assessed by a clinician and then the plan will go from there, in terms of what's the right intensity and duration for that child. If they are transitioning off, it would be a tapered process. It would not be sudden. We want to make sure it's as seamless as possible, that families get the support they need, both

directly from the autism funding program but our other programs that support these children as well: speech and language, respite for the parents, and so on. Those all continue.

MEMBER'S CONDUCT

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Last year, your Minister of Energy made sexist and patronizing remarks about Ontario's Auditor General. Then he doubled down, calling our leader, the leader of Ontario's NDP, “that woman.” Yesterday he made comments again about our leader that were sexist, unparliamentary and don't bear repeating. Surely, the Liberal code of conduct doesn't say that comparing women to dogs is okay. Premier, it's never okay. A code of conduct obviously doesn't go far enough. It's 2016. When is enough enough?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The minister has clarified his remarks, and he has—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The minister has clarified his remarks. He has been clear that he understands—we all understand—that offensive language has no place in this Legislature. As the Ottawa Citizen reported, Karen Fischer, the managing editor of the transcription service of the Legislature, said that based on the audio, they decided that “she's—she's all over the map” was the right representation of the words. Sometimes—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order. A one sentence wrap-up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was in the House at the time. Sometimes people do stumble over their words. The minister has apologized for any misunderstanding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: A year ago the Minister of Energy decided to “mansplain” the electricity system to Ontario's Auditor General, even though she spent 10 years at Manitoba Hydro. Then, yesterday, he decided to continue this pattern of degrading and disrespecting women. The minister's conduct was again an embarrassment to this assembly. No woman should have to put up with this kind of casual sexism.

Here at Queen's Park we should be leading by example. The Premier's credibility on sexual violence and harassment is being called into question. As she says, it's never okay, not even for her own caucus members and certainly not for her cabinet members. Will the Premier do what she should have done a year ago and show the Minister of Energy the door?

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark knows well what my concern is about what he just did.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The minister came into the House yesterday afternoon. He made an apology. He explained what had happened. He was very clear with the people of the—with the Legislature—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd prefer not the armchair decisions, please. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There was somebody else who said something unparliamentary, and I wish that that would not happen any longer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is entirely appropriate, and it is what I would expect of one of my members: If there was a misunderstanding, if something was said that was inappropriate, that there would be an apology, that there would be an explanation. That is exactly what has happened.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, you recently announced that Ontario's high school graduation rate is now at its highest level in the province's history. Congratulations.

In 2015, the five-year graduation rate surpassed the government's goal of 85%. Now, more Ontario students than ever before are graduating with the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential. I think that's fantastic news.

I know students in my riding of Halton are working hard because graduation rates have also risen there to 89.9% in the district school board and to 92.4% in the Catholic school board.

Investing in our young people is a top priority for this government. Specialist High Skills Major programs help students graduate and provide them with more opportunities for future careers.

The minister announced recently that the Specialist High Skills Major program has been expanded.

Minister, can you please tell us more about this important announcement?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to thank the member for the question and for her support of Specialist High Skills Majors.

Yesterday morning, I visited Bishop Marrocco/Thomas Merton Catholic Secondary School here in Toronto, where we announced that Ontario is expanding two programs. First, we are expanding the Specialist High Skills Major program to accommodate an additional 2,000 students in just over 100 new programs for the 2016-17 school year. That will bring us to a total of more than 48,000 students who will be enrolled in 1,835 Specialist High Skills Majors across the province.

Second, we are expanding the Dual Credit Program, where students have one credit—partly high school, partly college—and that will be expanded to include 400 more students next year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Minister, I am pleased to hear that the expansion of the Specialist High Skills Major program will enable students to focus on graduating and will assist them in pursuing their post-secondary goals. This is a significant step toward securing a good future for themselves and their families.

This specialized program allows students to target their learning in a specific economic sector while also meeting the requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. It helps students make the important transition from high school to apprenticeship training, college, university or the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I've seen first-hand just how great some of these programs are. In fact, I toured some of them in Halton with the minister, including a fantastic aquaponics program at Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School. These programs are a key part of our government's commitment to keep young people engaged.

Minister, please explain how the Specialist High Skills Major program benefits students.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Just following up on what the member said, the aquaponics program was really cool because it wasn't just horticulture; it actually combined the computer tech students who were doing the control systems for the hydroponics. So it was a very cool example of things that you can do with Specialist High Skills Majors.

One of the things that's happening in 2016-17 is that all of the SHSM programs will have access to an innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship module that was developed in partnership with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

District school boards report that the Specialist High Skills Major program is particularly engaging for students considering college and workplace destinations. Students taking workplace courses achieve credits at the rate of 94% in their SHSM, as opposed to non—

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

New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mrs. Julia Munro: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Ross, a constituent in my riding, contacted me about his daughter Serenity. Serenity has autism, as does his older son. Serenity had the opportunity to experience five weeks of IBI therapy, and grew remarkably during this time. It is almost time for her six-month reassessment, and by all indications she will lose this vital therapy. To make matters worse, nobody, not even the providers, has a clear understanding of what the enhanced ABA treatment actually is.

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Serenity's family followed the rules, but at the stroke of a pen saw their daughter's opportunities disappear. How do you explain to her father that there is fairness in a system that denies her treatment that she has been waiting for for years?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the Minister of Children and Youth Services has said, the point of the

changes we're making is that Serenity needs to be able to continue the service and the intensity of the therapy that she needs. That is exactly why we are doing this: So that young people who are sitting on a waiting list—now, Serenity is already getting service, so we want to make sure that she can continue with the intensity that she needs.

That's why the programs need to be tailored. That's why the assessment—as the minister has said, there will be a look at what kind of service needs to continue. If that intensity is necessary, then that's what she will get going forward.

But our deep concern is that there are children sitting on a waiting list who are not getting any service. That is unacceptable. It cannot go on. That is why we are making this investment.

As I said about the comments of the leader of the third party, I agree that the implementation is extremely important. Parents need to understand. The ministry is working with providers to make sure that people get the information that will help them understand what's going to happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Kristen Tignanelli lives in North Bay. Her son Luca was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. Luca previously qualified for IBI therapy, but when Kristen recently reapplied, she was told he could no longer receive the important therapy he needs. You see, Luca had recently turned five, and he no longer meets the arbitrary age cut-off imposed by the government.

This government has a responsibility to ensure individuals with autism can realize their full potential. Instead, after years of waste, scandal and mismanagement, the Premier is attempting to balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable. Will the Premier reverse the changes to IBI and help Luca—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

One-sentence wrap-up, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Will the Premier reverse the changes to IBI and help Luca realize his full potential?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I have a responsibility as the Minister of Children and Youth Services to make sure we're doing absolutely everything we can to help children with autism and all children with special needs reach their full potential. That's why we're making this historic investment. That's why we're cutting wait times for services.

It is precisely this kind of situation which the member opposite is talking about, where unfortunately the youngest children who would benefit the most from intensive IBI are not getting it. That's why we have to change this system. But for that particular child, we want to make sure the transition to the new program is as smooth and

successful as possible, that that child gets the intensive supports they need going forward and that they get a flexible program that meets their needs, and for the right duration.

My commitment is to all children with autism in Ontario. I will not waiver from my commitment to these children. We'll keep working—

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

New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. No matter who you are, the health of your family comes first, and it should come first for the government, too. But this Premier's hospital cuts are hurting patient care across southwestern Ontario.

In the past four months alone—just the past four months, Speaker—we've seen 169 nurses cut in Windsor, almost 125 jobs cut from hospitals in London, 68 in Kitchener and another 12 health care workers cut in Sarnia. The list goes on and on.

Patients and families know exactly what that means. It means less care and longer wait times for people in the emergency room, for seniors who need surgery and for mums and dads with sick children. Why is this Premier turning her back on the people of southwestern Ontario by cutting the hospital care that every family depends on?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The leader of the third party knows that we're making important investments in our health care system, to the tune of an additional \$1 billion this year—so almost \$52 billion spent on health care. That's 25% of the government's budget—sorry; that's nearly 45% of the government's budget.

Specifically, when it comes to our hospitals, the new, additional \$345-million investment that we have in our budget—which includes a 1% increase to the base budget of hospitals, which is part of the funding they receive—overall, it's a 2.1% increase, far above the rate of inflation, that will allow our hospitals to invest in our front-line health care workers. It will allow our hospitals to ensure that they're providing the highest-quality services for Ontarians, services that Ontarians deserve.

We're doing much more on the capital side as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier and her health minister should pay less attention to their own spin and more attention to patients in southwestern Ontario. Health care is the silent crisis of this Liberal government, and this Premier is only making problems worse.

St. Joe's in London say that they've seen a \$36.5-million reduction to their total budget over the past four years.

London Health Sciences said that this year marks the fifth year in a row that funding will not keep up with inflationary pressures. That's not me, Speaker; that is what London Health Sciences is saying.

Across the southwest, from Sarnia to Wallaceburg to St. Thomas to Kitchener, hospitals are cutting patient care and they are laying off dedicated front-line caregivers. That is the fact. The very people who save lives and provide exceptional care when families need it the most are being given a pink slip.

When will this Premier start putting the best interests of patients first for a change and stop the Liberal cuts to hospitals across southwestern Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know that yesterday I talked about the fact that the NDP, when they were in government, closed 24% of the hospital beds in the province and 13% of the mental health budget. They cut hospital funding in their last year, but I think it's fair to talk about more recent as well: that in the 2014 election campaign, when they committed to finding \$600 million, the leader of the third party refused to identify where that would come from.

Fortunately, the candidate for Kitchener–Waterloo was forced to admit that the health care and post-secondary education sectors were singled out for their deepest cuts. She said that—in fact, it's quoted on CBC News—the minister would look to find efficiencies—sorry, the new accountability minister that they talked about would find efficiencies in the health care and post-secondary education sectors. When the member for Kitchener was pressed on it, she said, “I would go first to health” to find that \$600 million in cuts.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Granville Anderson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, I understand that your ministry is making significant capital investments as part of the 2016 budget to expand and improve post-secondary learning spaces across this province.

This is excellent news, as many students in Durham are now starting to think about post-secondary education. The concerted effort of strengthening and modernizing OSAP, combined with boosting the capacity and educational environments of universities and colleges, is a well-coordinated commitment.

Minister, could you please inform the House of one particular capital announcement that you made recently at Durham College?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Durham for that question as well as for his tireless advocacy on behalf of Durham College and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

Last month, with the member from Durham, I was pleased to announce that our government is investing \$22 million to support a new Centre for Collaborative Education at Durham College. This new facility will replace the historic Simcoe Building. It will also feature a business incubator to connect student entrepreneurs with local experts to launch the start of companies; modern labs for Durham's health programs, with new courses in pharmacy and behavioural sciences; and a space for the Global Class initiative to offer online lectures to connect students with thinkers from all over the world.

This project is a part of Ontario's plan to provide \$3 billion in capital funding to our post-secondary institutions across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. By the way, Speaker, this was one event where the member who represents the riding didn't bother showing up to that announcement.

Now, I understand that in addition to the recent Durham College announcement, the 2016 budget also included funding for several other capital projects, including a very exciting one in downtown Toronto at OCAD University. The residents of Durham will be glad to hear this, as I am sure that many of them are interested in pursuing a degree in the arts and design.

Minister, would you please inform the House on the importance of these capital investments, with specific reference to the OCAD University capital investment that you announced this past April?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member from Durham. Last April, with the help of the member from Spadina—

Interjection: Trinity–Spadina.

Hon. Reza Moridi: —Trinity–Spadina, I was pleased to announce that our government will be investing \$27 million into the OCAD University campus expansion project. The project is called OCAD University Creative City Campus, and it will lead to the expansion and refurbishment of studio spaces and fabrication technology at 100 McCaul Street; the creation of collaborative learning spaces in the Sharp Centre for Design, including new shared student spaces, a student commons and an indigenous visual culture centre; and an expansion of the Art and Design Library for the Future and development of a centre for experiential learning.

Mr. Speaker, this project will provide OCAD University students with vastly expanded and improved learning facilities, including a modernization of its hallmark studio-based learning facilities.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Kitchener–Waterloo has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier concerning the code of conduct. This matter will be debated next Tuesday at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to the motion for allocation of time on Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

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

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On May 4, Mr. Naqvi moved government notice of motion number 65. Mr. Smith then moved that the motion be amended as follows:

“That the section beginning, ‘That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet at its regularly scheduled times’ be struck out and replaced by:

“That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet at its regularly scheduled times on Monday, May 16, 2016” —

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Agreed.

We are now dealing with Mr. Smith’s amendment to the motion. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Nicholls, Rick
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Scott, Laurie
Brown, Patrick	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Jagmeet
Clark, Steve	Hudak, Tim	Smith, Todd
Coe, Lorne	Jones, Sylvia	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Walker, Bill
French, Jennifer K.	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm	Yakubuski, John
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yurek, Jeff
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hunter, Mitzie	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Del Duca, Steven	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 38; the nays are 50.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the amendment lost.

Are the members ready to vote on the main motion?

Mr. Naqvi has moved government notice of motion number 65. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1151 to 1152.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hunter, Mitzie	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Del Duca, Steven	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Nicholls, Rick
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Scott, Laurie
Brown, Patrick	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Jagmeet
Clark, Steve	Hudak, Tim	Smith, Todd
Coe, Lorne	Jones, Sylvia	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Walker, Bill
French, Jennifer K.	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm	Yakubuski, John
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yurek, Jeff
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 50; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

HEALTH INFORMATION PROTECTION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RENSEIGNEMENTS SUR LA SANTÉ

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, to make certain related amendments and to repeal and replace the Quality of Care Information Protection Act, 2004 / Projet de loi 119, Loi visant à modifier la Loi de 2004 sur la protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé, à apporter certaines modifications connexes et à abroger et à remplacer la Loi de 2004 sur la protection des renseignements sur la qualité des soins.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1155 to 1156.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On Wednesday, May 4, 2016, Mr. Hoskins moved third reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, to make certain related amendments and to repeal and replace the Quality of Care Information Protection Act, 2004.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Horwath, Andrea	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Hunter, Mitzie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Lalonde, Marie-France	Singh, Jagmeet
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	Malhi, Harinder	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Thibeault, Glenn
DiNovo, Cheri	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Fife, Catherine	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McGarry, Kathryn	Zimmer, David
Fraser, John	McMahon, Eleanor	
French, Jennifer K.	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Brown, Patrick	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Clark, Steve	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Coe, Lorne	McDonnell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Nicholls, Rick	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1159 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BAPTISM OF POLAND

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Today, I have the honour to rise and recognize the 1,050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland. The introduction of Christianity in its western form with the baptism of Prince Mieszko I in 966 was

one the most pivotal moments in Polish history. This event had profound consequences and determined the future destiny of the country and its people. It marks the symbolic founding of the first Polish state and lays the major foundations of Polish identity and culture.

It is also the traditional starting point of Poland's recorded history. Mieszko's acceptance of Roman Christianity, through his marriage to Dobrawa, a Czech princess, has shaped the course of Polish history and identity up to this day, 1,050 years later. As a result, literacy, law, education, early use of the Polish language, institutions of higher learning, music and architecture developed within the Christian framework.

Ontario is home to a half a million Canadians of Polish heritage. We are very proud of the contribution Polish Canadians have made to our province since first settling here more than 155 years ago.

Speaker, on behalf of our leader, Patrick Brown, and the entire Ontario PC caucus, I'd like to extend my warmest wishes to all Poles celebrating the 1,050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland today.

TAMIL GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE MONTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: May is Tamil Genocide Remembrance Month, and while it's absolutely important to remember the tragedies, including the human rights violations, the war crimes and, in fact, the genocide that the Tamil community has endured, it's also important to note that these adversities are ongoing and the Tamil community continues to face oppression at the hands of the Sri Lankan government.

Despite these adversities, the Tamil community has shown such tremendous resilience. In fact, they continue to thrive in the diaspora. In addition, they've shown inspirational commitment to celebrating their arts, music, culture and, in fact, their language. It's something that inspires us all.

On a personal note as a Sikh, our community has also endured genocide, and it's for that reason I also stand in solidarity with the Tamil community.

In addition, Andrea Horwath and all New Democrats stand in solidarity with the Tamil community in remembering the past injustices and the ongoing oppression. We also stand in solidarity with the ongoing struggle for a permanent solution based on peace, freedom and justice for the Tamil people in their nation of Tamil Eelam.

On May 9, at 3 p.m., the NDP will be hosting a memorial event to remember the genocide and all those who lost their lives. It will be held at 3 p.m. in the NDP caucus boardroom.

SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's an honour to rise in this House and recognize May as South Asian Heritage Month.

As the General Conference of UNESCO rightly asserted, "Cultural diversity is as necessary for human-

kind as biodiversity is for nature.” In December 2001, the government of Ontario passed the South Asian Heritage Act, proclaiming the month of May as South Asian Heritage Month and May 5 as South Asian Arrival Day. This is a time to acknowledge, reflect on and celebrate the rich history of South Asians in Ontario.

As many of you know, Ontario has a large South Asian population, made up of immigrants from, and descendants of, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and many other countries. South Asians have been settling in Ontario since the beginning of the 20th century. We don't have to look far to get a sense of the experience that members of the South Asian community had while settling in Ontario.

My family came to Canada in the 1960s. It wasn't easy. It was hard, just like it would be to settle in any other place, especially a new country. But we were fortunate enough to be rewarded for our hard work, and I feel it's my responsibility and my family's responsibility to do the same for the people that will be following us in the future.

As I know, this is an experience that many Ontarians can relate to. As a member of Ontario's South Asian community, I'm proud to say that the South Asian community has provided another layer of colour, tradition and heritage to the multicultural fabric of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to finish by saying that I know first-hand that the values of South Asian are the values of Ontarians, and my caucus continues to stand firmly with the South Asian community of Ontario.

INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY SECTOR IN DURHAM

Mr. Lorne Coe: I would like to outline what we're doing in Durham region with our innovation and technology sector.

The Spark Centre in particular inspires entrepreneurs to start and grow successful, innovative companies. Since arriving in Whitby–Oshawa in 2010, Spark has helped more than 700 local companies get off the ground. Spark works to improve Durham region's competitiveness and visibility as a world-class innovation cluster. It elevates and supports key industry sectors, including health, manufacturing, digital media and high-tech, among many others.

Helping feed the increasing demand for jobs in these sectors are the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Trent University and Durham College. They're perfectly positioned to encourage the growth of the innovation and technology sector in Durham region.

But the business growth cannot continue without matching support for our universities and colleges. Properly funding higher education and, in particular, bridging the skills gap will create the path to jobs, and that's what this province so desperately needs.

We have such a great and growing opportunity in Durham region. We want to ensure that particularly the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Trent

University and Durham College are properly positioned to feed the need in this innovation and technology sector.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Paul Miller: Hydro One crews recently clear-cut the trees and sprayed herbicide all along Hamilton's beautiful beach trail. Instead of working with the city to protect both the trail and the transmission wires, Hydro One has left only stumps of what was once a prized Hamilton attraction.

Now, Speaker, Hydro One is going to clear-cut a strip the width of a football field right up the Red Hill Valley. Local residents have protested. The local councillor and I have asked them to consult with residents and to work with the city to find a better way.

In March, Hydro One promised my office that it would organize a community meeting to address residents' concerns, but that never happened. Hydro One doesn't care about consultation. Now it plans to begin clear-cutting in a week and a half. There is no accountability. Hydro One, which is still 70% publicly owned, told our constituents to go to the Ontario Energy Board. The energy board said it has no authority. The ministry says that Hydro One is no longer a public institution, so call Hydro One's community line.

No one, Speaker, is taking responsibility. No one is listening. The Red Hill Valley is an environmentally and culturally sensitive piece of land. If Hydro One can clear-cut a trail and spray herbicide at will, then our environmental and cultural legislation exists only at the pleasure of big corporate interests.

MAISON VALE HOSPICE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: “Everyone should be able to live and die in peace, with dignity, free of pain, surrounded by loved ones, in the setting of their choice.” That's the vision statement of the Maison Vale Hospice in Sudbury.

I'm very pleased to be able to stand up in this great Legislature today to talk about the great work that Maison Vale Hospice is doing in Sudbury and throughout northeastern Ontario.

This past weekend, my community came together to celebrate the hospice and also to help the hospice raise some much-needed funds. I'm very proud to say that, so far, over \$150,000 has been raised in the Hike for Hospice out of my community of Sudbury, and I know there are many other hikes for hospices right across our province and right across our great country.

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I also want to acknowledge that RBC has been a big sponsor for us in Sudbury. They have helped raise over a million dollars for our hospice in the last nine years. I've been there since the beginning, 10 years, in Sudbury. We see more and more participating every year. This year over a thousand participants helped raise money for this year and for that goal.

A quote by Mother Teresa was brought forward: “Not a lot of us can do great things. But we can all do small things with great love.” It was great to see over a thousand people in my riding doing small things with great love for a great organization.

TREE PLANTING

Mr. Ted Arnott: Last fall, this House unanimously passed our resolution calling on the government to establish an Ontario Green Legacy Programme. Based on the county of Wellington’s Green Legacy Programme, it would seek to plant 150 million trees, starting in 2017, to mark the 150th anniversary of Ontario within Confederation.

Last month, I organized and hosted a meeting in my office with senior Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry staff, including Deputy Minister Bill Thornton, as well as with Gary Cousins, Mark Van Patter and Rob Johnston from the county of Wellington. The meeting was productive and gave us the opportunity to discuss our Green Legacy Programme idea and make the case for a significant expansion of Ontario’s tree planting efforts.

It has now been more than six months since my resolution was passed, and 2017 is fast approaching. We need the government to make a public commitment to implement our Ontario Green Legacy Programme proposal. Again, our resolution was passed unanimously by this House, with members from all parties speaking in favour. If private members’ business is to be meaningful, the government needs to listen to the will of this House and not ignore it.

We know the government is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and they say they want to combat climate change. Again, I would suggest that an Ontario Green Legacy Programme could and should be part of this strategy. This is doable. We can harness the volunteer spirit of Ontarians and their noble desire to confront the climate change challenge head-on. I once again call upon the government to commit to establishing an Ontario Green Legacy Programme and immediately begin the work needed to launch this program next year.

TORONTO RAPTORS

Mr. Han Dong: Today, I would like to recognize the Toronto Raptors as they head into game 2 of the eastern semifinals of the NBA playoffs. After winning a tight series against the Indiana Pacers in an exciting game 7 finish, they look to tie the second round against “D-Wade” and the Miami Heat tonight at the ACC.

Mr. Speaker, the Raptors, along with the Jays, the Rock, TFC and the Marlies have brought excitement to Toronto sports fans, excitement that had been missing for a long, long time—the playoffs. You can feel the vibe downtown on a game day. The Raptors have encapsulated the spirit of Toronto and are bringing the people of Toronto and Ontario together under one banner. Each victory brings us closer together.

The Raptors are being supported by fans across the province. Even one of Ontario’s homegrown talents, Drake, has become a true ambassador for the team and the city, injecting passion and excitement into the community. This is a great example of how sports can inspire, unite and build a stronger community.

Good luck tonight, Raptors. All of Toronto and Ontario will be cheering for you. “We the North.”

JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Mike Colle: I’m here to speak to Jewish Heritage Month, May, as proclaimed by a bill passed in this Legislature. It declares the month of May every year as Jewish Heritage Month.

The Jewish community has had a presence in Ontario since the War of 1812. It is to be found in almost every small town, big town and across Ontario, whether it be South Porcupine, Bancroft, Hamilton, Oshawa or Peterborough. They’re in every community. They’ve been there as pioneers, building communities. They’ve worked in everything from small industry to agriculture to medicine.

They have built the foundation of many of our great institutions here in Ontario. For instance, down the street here we have Mount Sinai Hospital, founded by the Jewish community. In my own riding, I have Baycrest hospital.

We’ve got a great legacy of philanthropy, of entrepreneurship and of great service in the armed forces for all of our great wars.

In this month, I hope that in all of your communities, especially in Ottawa, you do something to recognize the members of the Jewish community who have contributed so much for the last couple of hundred years to make Ontario and Canada a great province and country.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements, and I make note that when one of the members from the government side was making a statement, his own members were heckling him for leaving out the Leafs. I just wanted to let you know that.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS AMENDMENT ACT

(WAITING LISTS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA GARDE D’ENFANTS ET LA PETITE ENFANCE (LISTES D’ATTENTE)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 195, An Act to amend the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 / Projet de loi 195, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la garde d’enfants et la petite enfance.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The bill amends the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, to require every person that maintains a waiting list in respect of child care to prepare a written policy setting out how the waiting list is administered. It also prohibits persons from charging or accepting a fee or deposit before a child is admitted for child care, ending the process of charging people to be on a wait-list.

1733387 ONTARIO CORP. ACT, 2016

Mr. Dong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr44, An Act to revive 1733387 Ontario Corp.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

PETITIONS

AUTOMOTIVE DEALERS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Bill 152, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2015 is a vital tool that supports Ontario’s auto sector by cutting red tape for dealers and consumers when a vehicle is purchased or leased; and

“Whereas, in 2011, the province of Ontario conducted a pilot project on in-house vehicle licensing at two new car dealerships that was well received by the participants; and

“Whereas the province of Quebec has permitted automobile dealers to conduct in-house vehicle registrations since 2003, with 700 dealers currently participating;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately pass Bill 152 into law, to promote Ontario’s auto retail sector by cutting red tape for motor vehicle dealers and consumers to save them time and money.”

I’m happy to add my name and give it to page Benjamin.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “Nurses Know—Petition for Better Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas providing high-quality, universal, public health care is crucial for a fair and thriving Ontario; and

“Whereas years of underfunding have resulted in cuts to registered nurses (RNs) and hurt patient care; and

“Whereas, in 2015 alone, Ontario lost more than 1.5 million hours of RN care due to cuts; and

“Whereas procedures are being off-loaded into private clinics not subject to hospital legislation; and

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“Whereas funded services are being cut from hospitals and are not being provided in the community; and

“Whereas cutting skilled care means patients suffer more complications, readmissions and death;

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

“Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

“Commit to restoring hospital base operating funding to at least cover the costs of inflation and population growth;

“Create a fully-funded multi-year health human resources plan to bring Ontario’s ratio of registered nurses to population up to the national average;

“Ensure hospitals have enough resources to continue providing safe, quality and integrated care for clinical procedures and stop plans for moving such procedures into private, unaccountable clinics.”

I sign this petition and give it page Faiz.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

“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 ... 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” through to “third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to Spencer.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Lorne Coe: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Children and Youth Services announced on March 29th that children with autism over five years old will be ineligible to receive intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) therapy; and

“Whereas in 2014-15 there were 16,158 children with autism on the wait-list for IBI and applied behavioural analysis (ABA) therapy; and

“Whereas approximately 3,500 children with autism that are on the wait-list or currently receiving therapy in Ontario will be ineligible to receive IBI therapy as a result of the minister’s decision; and

“Whereas children over the age of five still respond to therapy and IBI remains their best shot at learning to communicate with the world around them and developing a degree of independence;

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

“That the Minister of Children and Youth Services reverse her decision and allow children over five years old to have access to IBI therapy.”

I agree with the content and will affix my signature and provide it to page Julia.

NEWBORN HEALTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today being the International Day of the Midwife, I have decided to read a petition that was sent to me by Alexander Dolan from Woodbridge, but the signatures come from all over Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Health Protection and Promotion Act ... calls for the mandatory administration of erythromycin ointment as a prophylactic agent into the eyes of all newborns and specifies that the Health Care Consent Act ... does not apply to the prevention or treatment of communicable diseases of the eyes of the newborn;

“Whereas research evidence shows that the administration of erythromycin is ineffective at preventing infection;

“Whereas the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Association of Ontario Midwives call for the rescinding of the mandatory ocular prophylaxis laws;

“We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Health Protection and Promotion Act be amended to remove the forced administration of ophthalmic ointment.”

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

MEN’S HEALTH

Mr. Joe Dickson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas men’s health is an integral component of population health, affecting Ontario families, communities, businesses and society;

“Whereas many men’s health issues—if not all—benefit from early diagnosis, which is most often achieved through proactive monitoring of health and regular examinations;

“Whereas the stigma associated with a number of men’s health issues, and the failure to conduct regular physical examinations, can be at least partially mitigated through increased public awareness and the sharing of personal stories;

“Whereas June is a special and significant month for men and their families, with the third Sunday in June recognized internationally as Father’s Day;

“Whereas groups like the Canadian Men’s Health Foundation are developing innovative tools and programs, like the YouCheck health awareness tool, that could be promoted during a dedicated awareness week;

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

“To support increased awareness and advocacy of men’s health issues by working towards passage and adoption of Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men’s Health Awareness Week.”

Of course, I acknowledge the MPP from Beaches–East York for his initiation of that.

HOME CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a large number of petitions in support of personal support workers who work for the VON in Parry Sound. It reads:

“Whereas home care should be patient-centred and the priority is direct care, not profit; and

“Whereas the privatization of health services has led to the delivery of services that have become profit-driven rather than care-driven;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that home care be guided by the principle of caring for patients first, without regard for private profit-making.”

I support this petition and give it to Spencer.

AUTISM TREATMENT

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

“Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

“Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

“Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only rec-

ognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

“Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately”16,160; and

“Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

“Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

“Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation.”

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it's about fluoridating all Ontario drinking water.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to Emma to bring to the table.

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AUTISM TREATMENT

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

“Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

“Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

“Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and ...

“Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

“Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

“Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and send it down with Brendan.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial government has cancelled the Northlander passenger train which served the residents of northeastern Ontario; and

“Whereas the provincial government has closed bus stations and is cancelling bus routes despite promising enhanced bus services to replace the train; and

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) has been given a mandate that its motor coach division must be self-sustaining; and

“Whereas Metrolinx, the crown corporation that provides train and bus service in the GTA of Toronto, is subsidized by more than \$100 million annually; and

“Whereas the subsidy to Metrolinx has increased annually for the last seven years;

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

“To direct the Minister of Northern Development and Mines to reverse the decision to cancel bus routes im-

mediately and to treat northerners equitably in decisions regarding public transportation.”

I wholeheartedly agree and will send it down with page Ayana.

UNADDRESSED MAIL

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

“Whereas hundreds of Toronto residents have complained at all three levels of government, Toronto Police Service, and Canada Post about receiving an unsolicited publication pretending to be a community paper, the contents of which can be argued to be racist, sexist, homophobic and advocating violence, both in written content and the use of graphic imagery;

“Whereas the publication referenced above is not a ‘community paper’ in that it clearly indicates a subscription price ... on its cover;

“Whereas the publication referenced above is delivered without privacy packaging...;

“Whereas the publication referenced above should qualify as ‘non-mailable matter’ based on sections 1 and 2 of Canada Post’s published Non-mailable Matter guide, and that Canada Post continues to deliver such material...;

“Whereas Canada Post offers this ... service at an additional cost, a business practice that can be changed by the crown corporation;

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

“To formally bring the issue of Canada Post’s ‘un-addressed mail service’ to the official attention of the Canadian government; to explain the necessity of updating the regulations of this service...; and to order that Canada Post adhere to and enforce its regulations, particularly those of non-mailable matter, in the interests of all Ontarians.”

I agree with this petition, sign it and leave it with page Alfred.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Bill Walker: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should proclaim the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in Ontario, to recognize the gold ribbon as the awareness symbol of childhood cancer and to strongly encourage all citizens to join in the fight against childhood cancer.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Walker has moved private member’s notice of motion number

72. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s an honour for me to bring the childhood cancer awareness resolution forward for consideration. If supported by members today, then we will declare the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in Ontario. Further, it will make the gold ribbon the symbol of childhood cancer awareness, a standard that is recognized worldwide and that should be recognized in Ontario too.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce a number of special guests who have joined us in support to observe this debate today. They are:

—Neal Rourke, an international childhood cancer advocate and Tribute Lighting Program volunteer coordinator with Childhood Cancer International. He is also a member of the US Coalition Against Childhood Cancer, CAC2; Canada’s Big Book of Care coalition of childhood cancer family financial and psychosocial support groups, and Advocacy for Canadian Childhood Oncology Research Network, Ac2orn; and, more importantly, the father of Brendan. Thank you for being here.

—Antonia Palmer, founder of Neuroblastoma Canada; co-founder of Ac2orn.

—Susan Kuczynski, parent liaison with Ontario Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer.

—Renee Simmons, parent liaison, family support specialist with Childcan London, Ontario.

—Kathleen Bernard, executive director, Childcan, from London.

—Natasha Bowes, senior manager, fund development, Childhood Cancer Canada.

—Clare Davenport, CEO, Childhood Cancer Canada.

—Patricia Zareba, fund development manager, Childhood Cancer Canada.

—Ron Mitchell, co-founder of Coast to Coast Against Cancer Foundation.

—Jacqui DeBique, communications and knowledge transfer manager, Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario.

—Marjorie Morrison, CEO, Canadian Cancer Action Network.

Madam Speaker, I would also just like to read a little excerpt from a letter of support from Childcan; I’m going to summarize it by saying what I believe they really want people to hear: “We are wholeheartedly behind this resolution and the adoption of the gold ribbon as the awareness symbol of childhood cancer.”

Welcome and thank you to all of you for the key role you play in saving our children and youth and bringing childhood cancer awareness to the floor of this Legislature.

Madam Speaker, today we have an opportunity to support every family and child affected by this life-threatening illness, by passing my resolution. It’s often said that we do too many awareness bills and resolutions in this House. In a way, for some people, that may be true. But allow me to discuss my reasons for dedicating

my private member's ballot date to the children and youth living with cancer in Ontario.

Somewhere this very moment there is a family packing up the car to drive to one of the following: the Hospital for Sick Children, the Children's Hospital in London, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Kingston General Hospital or McMaster Children's Hospital. Their world has been turned upside down, and their child is hurting. We can't begin to imagine the raw emotions, self-doubts and uncertainties of parents whose child is affected by this life-threatening illness. In the words of my hero, Terry Fox, "Somewhere the hurting must stop."

The intention is that whether it's through members' statements or recognition by way of resolutions like mine, we take the time every September to recognize our children and youth and let them know that they are not alone, and that we will do better for them by standing united to conquer childhood cancer.

Consider the impact of it, just in Ontario. On any given day, 3,000 kids need cancer care in our province. Four hundred more children will be diagnosed with cancer this year. Two in three, or 65%, will suffer long-term effects, including infertility, heart disease, hearing loss and learning disabilities.

Children are most affected by leukemias (32%), central nervous system tumours (19%) and lymphomas (11%), kidneys, bones and muscles. The average child's age is five. One in five, or 20%, sadly, will die.

Yet it is estimated that only 3% of cancer research money is directed to childhood cancers, according to Childhood Cancer International.

As childhood cancer is the number one cause of disease-related death for children ages one to 14, the fight should not be fought alone. Across the entire world, from the United Arab Emirates to China, people are taking action to raise awareness of prevention and early detection of cancer. That is what the Gold Ribbon Campaign is about: to mobilize help for raising funds for family support, research and, most importantly, finding cures and saving our beloved children.

Last September, my constituent, cancer advocate and dad Neal Rourke, did just that when he, along with three young cancer survivors, rang the opening bell at the Toronto Stock Exchange in recognition of childhood cancer. Volunteers like Neal are reminding us that we need to do more so we can build a future free from cancer; that is, to build on the progress achieved, and to make new drug research possible so we can ensure a brighter and healthier future for all of our children. That means government, industry, hospitals, research institutes and individual and corporate donors—everyone—has to join the fight against childhood cancer.

My reason for introducing this resolution is also a personal one: It is in memory of Conah Higgins and Neal's son, Brendan Rourke, whose childhoods have been regrettably cut short. I stood in this House probably about a year and a half or so ago, Madam Speaker, and we celebrated, again, as a result of Neal's encouragement

and urging to recognize and wear gold ribbons in the House.

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Conah Higgins is a young man, the son of dear family friends from England. Conah was in the process of moving to Canada from the UK when he sadly passed away from cancer at the age of 17. He really didn't even know he had it. He started out with a little sore on his arm. By the time he got diagnosed, it was only about two or three months that he actually survived after that.

The other is in memory of Brendan Rourke, a young man from my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and to recognize the tireless advocacy work of his father, Neal, who, in collaboration with an international network of parent groups and survivor networks, is raising funds, is raising awareness for young boys and girls whose childhoods have been regrettably cut short.

It was proud the day that, I believe, Neal was able to stand with those other survivors and ring the bell and light up the CN Tower. I know that Neal has got lots of plans. I've never seen someone so dedicated: the energy that he puts in, the conviction, the commitment. That, of course, is a legacy to his son, but also so that others don't have to suffer what he and his family have gone through.

Volunteers like Neal are reminding us that we need to do more so we can build a future free from cancer—to build, as I said earlier, on that progress achieved to make new drug research possible so we can ensure a brighter and healthier future for all of our children. It means all of us: government, industry, hospitals, research institutes, and individual and corporate donors—everyone has to join together to fight childhood cancer.

Madam Speaker, there are stories like what I have just shared with Conah and Brendan every day, sadly. I recommend that we recognize their extraordinary challenges and feats. They deserve to be honoured by having this resolution passed today so that every year in September we take the time to recognize the brave fight that these amazing children and their parents and their support circle of friends and family realize every day in their communities and in our communities.

While this is just really scratching the surface of what really needs to be done, it's nevertheless, I believe, an important commitment we need to make to our children. It's a symbol that we are here for them, that we will make the effort to find a cure, that we'll work tirelessly to ensure that we give them every opportunity to grow and thrive and live in a world that is free from cancer in all its forms.

In the end, it is my hope that we will soon, for the dream of my hero, Terry Fox, find a cure for all cancers. "Somewhere the hurting must stop."

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege to rise on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin, and to commend the member for bringing this motion forward. We see eye to eye on this one.

I'm sure everybody in the House today hears the cries of parents out there on the lawn who are fighting for their children. That's a fight that they are taking on.

This is one that I believe all of us in this House can absolutely agree upon.

I want to take a little bit more of a positive note to tell you how this has affected my life and given me new friends. We all participate at the Relay For Life events that are going on in each and every one of our communities. There's one thing that I really want to specify and that I believe we all understand: Cancer does not discriminate. It takes away moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, neighbours and kids. Sometimes we wonder, "What is He thinking, above there, by taking one of the most precious gifts that we have?" We often question that judgment, but I always say there is an angel who is needed up at the Pearly Gates, and that's why they are on their way.

I want to talk to you about a fine young little boy from Mindemoya. His name is Landen Harasym. He found me on Facebook and he called me and sent me a message. He said, "Would you mind coming to my mom's place of work? We're raising awareness for childhood cancer, and I'd like to paint your nails." So, of course, into my truck I go, and off I go to Manitoulin Island. I sit down and meet up with him. I had no idea they organized this. The media was there to take pictures, and it was just a fabulous afternoon of doing this. I met up with his beautiful little sister—her name is Hailee—his grandmother Marilyn and his mom, Marilee Harasym.

It was just a wonderful shop. They painted my nails in nice little yellows and blues and purples and bright greens. You know, nice fall colours. It was really, really pretty. If you ever want to get out of your comfort zone—and this is what awareness is all about: getting out of your comfort zone so that you can create awareness. Mind you, I have no problem getting out of my comfort zone. I actually look at opportunities to get out of my comfort zone to raise awareness for a vast number of issues that I believe in.

They painted my nails, and we had a wonderful afternoon. We had chit-chats and everything. That afternoon, I left Manitoulin Island and went to meet up with the cattlemen's association. That afternoon was the first time I met up with the cattlemen's association. Mind you, it was the first time they met up with their local member of Parliament that afternoon, as well, and when I extended my hand to shake hands with them, they went, "Whoa, look at his painted nails." They took a step back and were wondering, "What the heck are we getting involved with? This is our member?"

I explained the situation and everybody just goes, "Oh, yes, that's right. Good on you. Good on you for doing that." So I left that event after a bunch of chuckles, and I'm leaving Manitoulin Island with my wife. Madam Speaker, I was going too fast. My wife and I were in a heated exchange at the moment, and one of our finest from the province pulls me over. I'm not making this up. You can't make this story up. This happened. It was actually in one of my columns in my riding.

The police officer pulls me over, comes over to my window, and I can see in the rear-view mirror that he is not impressed. He comes over, I roll down my window and I turn around and look at him, and say, "You know, I have no explanation. I'm sorry. You got me. I was going too fast." "Driver's licence and registration."

I reach into my glove compartment and pull them out. He does, "What the heck?" He sees my nails that are painted, and he questions me. He says—he looks at that, and I say, "Do you want an explanation?" And he goes, "No." I said, "Well, you're going to get it anyway." So I give him the explanation as to what I was doing. He hands me back my slip and tells me, "Now I understand, Mr. Mantha. You're rushing home to finish buffing your nails. Slow down. Have a nice day."

Now, the story doesn't end there, because I turned around the next day and made an extra donation because of the speeding ticket I got out of, the extra charge, because I was going to get charged a hefty amount that day. I called Landen and I said, "Thank you very much for what you did for me by painting my nails. You basically saved my wallet."

Developing that relationship with him—he often comes back, and I want to let everyone know that Landen has been in remission from the cancer that he had gone through for, I believe, six or seven years now. He often comes up to my condo. Each and every one of us who has a condo here—I live close to the hospital, so I offer my apartment to each and every person across my riding who is in financial difficulties because it's just a skip and a hop for them. Plus, it gives me company. Sometimes, when a mom or a grandpa or even a dad comes over, I get to have a free supper and company when I go home. It's always nice to have them.

Those are some of the stories that I have. These kids love to come up. They walk down Yonge Street, go up Bay Street, go down to the aquarium. Each and every one of us has that opportunity to open up our hearts and give our homes to them. I would encourage you all to do it, and I want to commend the member for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: What a privilege to stand in the House today and follow the member opposite in that wonderful story. I hope I can match its personality and passion. I want to salute the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for tabling this conversation today and for his passion, too. I had a chance to listen to your remarks. It's really touching and it's one of the great things about private members' time, when we get to hear from all members of the House about how, sometimes, they come into public life with their personal experiences and what got them here. It's clear for everyone here today that your passion was really put in front of us today, and we salute you for that. I love that you talked about Terry Fox. I'm going to talk about him in a second.

What a pleasure to talk about something that touches us all and is so important. It's often said—and it seems

trite but it's true—that cancer is a disease that touches us all. I'm sure every single member of this House has lost a family member, a friend or neighbour, and among them are children who have died of cancer. I have friends who are in that boat. I don't have children myself but I have friends who have children and who have lost children to cancer.

1350

I remember very vividly friends of mine whose daughter died of cancer at a young age. We all took turns staying with her at SickKids while she went through her course of treatment. I'm proud to say that I was part of that village that helped them and her. While she didn't survive that horrible disease, it was a privilege to be with that family and with her on her very difficult journey.

We have much to do when it comes to looking after our children who are diagnosed with cancer, because they are forced to grow up far too quickly. We know that these little angels, some of whom have gone to heaven, have really touched us all. We see in their spirit the impacts of the disease that they've had to face and the challenges that they've had: the endless medical treatments that they have to go through and the appointments. These are times when they should be learning, enjoying, playing and growing up, and instead, unfortunately, they're in the grips of this horrible disease.

The good news, of course, is that some of them do survive. While Ontario is a leader in cancer care, and while our survival rates are amongst the highest in the world, as has been noted already, we need to and must focus—particularly when it comes to our children—on better outcomes.

We understand that cancer care is an important example of how investments are being made. I think it's worth noting that our government has increased funding to Cancer Care Ontario from \$333 million in 2003 to over \$1.8 billion in 2014-15. That is an important number, Speaker, because it speaks to the growing challenges with cancer.

Children battling cancer have unique needs, and they need a support system. Thankfully, we have that system. I think it's again important to note that it takes a village. What we have here in Ontario is the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, or POGO, which plans, supports and seeks treatment, and is part of the framework of treatment for children. That system includes a provincial registry, a networked information system and evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.

These things are very important, again. They're part of the infrastructure for treatment. This system is designed to monitor the incidence and prevalence of childhood cancers, the demand for care and the workload of pediatric oncology programs, patient outcomes and the long-term effects of childhood cancer, all of which, again, are part of the larger issue. I'm proud to say that our government gave POGO, the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, \$6.3 million in base funding this year.

While we're making inroads, and while our cancer system has improved significantly in the past years—we

can say that we measure more, we know more and we report more—we're working towards increased accountability and continued improvement, because children in Ontario can and need to receive the best care that there is to offer.

Again, I want to salute the member opposite for allowing us to have this conversation today. This has touched us all. Continued advocacy on behalf of children facing a battle with cancer: There probably isn't a much more important topic that we could be discussing, and so I'm pleased to take part in it.

By shining a light on this issue and encouraging Ontarians across the province to join in the fight against childhood cancers, we can help to ensure that all children have that opportunity to be kids, and to become the leaders of our province and of our future that we know that they can be.

Thanks so much, Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Of course, I'm very pleased to rise today and to speak on behalf of my colleague the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and his motion. It's a resolution to call on the government to proclaim the month of September of each year as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in Ontario, to recognize the gold ribbon as the awareness symbol of childhood cancer, and to strongly encourage all citizens to join in the fight against childhood cancer.

A lot of what we do sometimes is to really be the cheerleaders for so many activists in our ridings, in other neighbouring ridings and all across Ontario, and to encourage them, because we know that the government can't take care of everybody, can't take care of everything, and can't even fund everything. So we need those people out there who have a passion in their heart, get involved and either create organizations to offer different types of support or just fundraise for support or research.

I'm really pleased, when we do have these commemorative ribbons and pins that we wear and we promote things, that we use our social media accounts not just to promote ourselves, not just to promote our side of the House in partisan politics, but we use them to promote all the great people across Ontario who want to fight for a better quality of life for everybody.

I think that that is what's really the focus: to do the best that we can do for the children of Ontario. We know we can't wave that magic wand and make everything perfect and make all childhood cancer disappear, but we can certainly do more to raise awareness and to help in the prevention and to help in the treatment.

When we hear news reports about parents whose children have meningitis and they don't understand that there is science behind the treatments, that there are specialists—we have fantastic doctors in Ontario, but if the child is not brought by the parents and the child can't express that, "I want to see a doctor or a specialist or travel to Toronto to SickKids Hospital"—the child can't fight for themselves, so it's really our job to fight for the

kids and to help the people who are there to fight for the kids.

I knew a woman—just somebody I worked out with at the gym—and she had two identical twin boys, four years old. One had leukemia and passed away and the other one was not ill and didn't. I think about it a lot, because here you have living proof: a twin who doesn't have his identical twin brother.

I want to bring up one issue sometimes with childhood cancers. My son actually had his thyroid removed—it was a malignant tumour—when he was 11 and a half. He was the oldest of four kids, so you can imagine the struggle that was, when you have three younger kids at home and you don't want them to know everything that's going on. He was 11 and a half years old. He was too old to be at SickKids but not quite old enough to be at Mount Sinai, which is the centre for thyroid cancer in Canada. Very few children have thyroid cancer, not because they can't have it but because it grows very slowly and it's not detected that young. A friend of mine is a pediatrician and it was caught very early and he got treatment very early. We were very fortunate that Mount Sinai Hospital agreed to take him on as a pretend 12-year-old, and he was followed from then on.

He's now starting his cardiology training. He has finished internal medicine and he will be taking care of many patients in Canada. So what goes around comes around. When we save a child's life, that child could go on to do fantastic things.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak, of course, in favour of the motion put forward by the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. It is a sad reality that so many of our young people suffer from cancer. There are about 10,000 children living with cancer in Canada today. Each year, about 1,500 new cases are diagnosed.

Childhood cancer is unique. It's not just a subset of adult cancer; it has its own specific biology and treatment and effects of treatment. On the one hand, adults are most affected by breast, lung, prostate, bowel and bladder cancers. Children, meanwhile, are most affected by leukemia and by tumours of the brain, nervous system, lymphatic system, kidney, bones and muscles. Leukemia is the most commonly diagnosed of these, comprising some 30% of the total new cases diagnosed each year. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL, is the most common form and comprises about 75% of these cases, with peak incidence at two to three years of age.

For adulthood cancers, causes can often be traced back to lifestyle, things like the environment, diet, alcohol, smoking—and I'm sure politics plays a role in there as well. But children's cancers usually aren't explainable, especially to a child. With the causes in most cases unknown, it presents that much more of a challenge to mitigate and to treat. The same treatments are often used for children. Just as with adults, they too undergo chemotherapy, radiation and surgery, but the difference is

how they experience these treatments. Children are more likely to have significant side effects like cognitive dysfunction, cataracts or even organ failure. The reality is that these harsh treatments are extremely tough on children's young and developing bodies. A major difference between the two, though, is that children have an overall cure rate of 80%, much higher than the 50% range for adults.

Even as cancer survivors, because of the process of treatment, many of these children will continue to experience health challenges throughout their lives. The health effects go beyond just what happens to their bodies. Cancer and all that is involved with treating it can prompt psychological and emotional issues for children long after a diagnosis or a cure. Their families, too, are wrapped up in the treatment of childhood cancer. They are such crucial supports to these young patients and, in so doing, often have to make tremendous sacrifices.

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Parents and other family members can also be affected both emotionally and in other ways. Some common family concerns during treatment include, of course, financial stresses—the member from Algoma–Manitoulin mentioned this—travelling to and staying near the cancer centre, the possible loss of a job and the need for home schooling. Cancer is really not limited to just the one person who suffers; its impact goes far beyond that.

There's no doubt that we've come a long way in terms of treating cancer for children and for adults. The survival rate is about 80%, and has risen from 46% since the 1960s. But there is so much more that can be done, which is why raising awareness about childhood cancer is such an important goal. Childhood cancer is still responsible for more deaths of children and adolescents in Canada than any other disease: more than asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis and AIDS combined. Canada loses tens of thousands of years of potential life each year to childhood cancer, and the impact of improvements in treatment and survival for childhood cancer could have a profound effect on our country, our province and our communities.

Take, for example, the story of Laura Hillier, a teen in Burlington who recently lost her life from a rare form of cancer. Even at one of the province's top cancer treatment centres, Juravinski Hospital in Hamilton, she wasn't able to get the treatment she needed in time.

I just want to say a few words about Laura, if I can get through this. She made a promise to her mother. She became an advocate for childhood cancer and for access to appropriate treatment throughout her journey. She made her mother promise that her mother would carry on this important cause. "She's left an important mark," said a doctor at Juravinski Hospital. "Laura and her mom really did the province and across the country a service in highlighting what they've gone through and the importance of the issue. It's had an effect at multiple levels."

Her mom said, "She lived her life to help others. There was no half measure for her. If she was going to do something, she was going to give it everything she had." That's what we should do as well, not only to honour the

life of Laura Hillier, but also to make sure that no other family in the province of Ontario has to go through what she did. Her mother finally said that she showed “incredible determination and resilience” throughout her battles with cancer.

I'll be thinking of Laura and the other children in the province of Ontario when I walk in the Relay for Life at WCI on Friday. I commend the member for bringing this forward. It is important. This is a shared cause that we all have. It's a shared responsibility we all have. Laura made a difference, and this government listened on two issues that Laura was particularly concerned about. This is the place to get things done and to work together to improve the health of all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Halton.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the private member's motion put forward by my colleague MPP Walker. I am proud to support this motion to proclaim the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in Ontario.

While the causes of pediatric cancer are still largely unknown by us, this heartbreaking disease continues to scar and wound families all over the world. This month will allow us to take a moment to remember and think about the lives lost and those who are still fighting this devastating disease, and to stand together with the families who are facing this terrible disease. It's about dedicating ourselves together to fighting this disease together.

I'm sure that everyone here who has a child or grandchild, or a friend or neighbour, can sympathize with any family coping with childhood cancer. No one wants to see a child suffer, ever, and certainly not from a disease as scary or as devastating as cancer.

I have two children of my own, and I cannot even begin to imagine what it must be like to watch your child undergo cancer treatment. I have, however, watched a young girl in our local community, at our local school, struggle with cancer. It was a moving experience and one that I really walked away from feeling completely at a loss to understand how this could happen to a child. The good news is that she was courageous, and she is a cancer survivor.

I'm proud to say that Ontario is a leader in cancer care in Canada and around the world. This year, the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario revealed that our province's cancer survival rates are among the highest worldwide, and I know our government is working hard to push those rates even higher. We have increased funding to Cancer Care Ontario from \$333.8 million in 2003-04 to \$1.8 billion in 2014-15. We've also increased funding for stem cell transplants by more than 600%—600%—in recent years.

But, of course, we know that too many Ontarians are diagnosed with cancer every year, and we could still do more. That's why I encourage all of my colleagues here in the House today to support this motion to declare September Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. This is

just one more way that all of us can work together to help protect our most beloved and our most vulnerable: our children.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from York-Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise today and speak in support of the recognition of the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound in bringing it to our attention today as something that deserves the recommendation and the support that making September Childhood Cancer Awareness Month each year in Ontario would do to encourage all citizens to make themselves more familiar with this most unfortunate concern of childhood cancer.

I think that, in today's world, there is no one who hasn't been touched by cancer, whether it's themselves, their family, their friends and neighbours. In my case, the childhood cancer story was very meaningful, because it was across the street from where I live: A seven-month-old baby who was still nursing was diagnosed with leukemia. It had the entire neighbourhood just torn between being frozen in horror and anxious to help where possible. It certainly demonstrates that while cancer may be something that is a terrible thing to go through, at the same time, it brings out the best in everyone around you.

This was a family with four children and a dairy farm. To see the way in which people slipped in to provide meals, take over the management of a dairy herd, get the baby and mother, on a regular basis, down to Sick Children's—and, of course, the baby was there for a long time, in and out for seven months. At the same time as this family was dealing with leukemia with a baby, so was someone else who came into the same unit. It just made it very difficult, because the other one didn't survive.

But the baby who was my neighbour—it was very difficult, as you can imagine, to have a seven-month-old to be able to communicate and be able to explain anything that was happening and so forth. But one message that the baby was able to make was when he had been there for a while and had the experience of all the specialists coming in. When he saw them, he'd say, “Bye-bye.” He knew that it would be better when they were gone. But he fought a tough battle. I have to tell you that, last year, in a grade 5 class, he came up to me and he said, “Mrs. Munro, I'm your neighbour from across the road.” It was a real thrill to see someone who, by the way, is taller than I, but the picture of health and such a success story.

As we know, all too many are diagnosed and either lose their battle with cancer or are unable to enjoy good health in the years following diagnosis. Cases like this are, of course, tragic for the family and leave an impact on the community.

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But we can look at some initiatives like Camp Ooch, which provides an opportunity for children who have

been challenged. It's a camp in Muskoka, and it serves the Toronto-area hospitals.

So there are things that we can look at as demonstrations of where we have been successful in providing some opportunity for families.

We need to stand united to conquer this disease, and we need to have the goal-driven campaign to help shine a light on the types of cancer that affect children in our communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a great honour to stand here and speak to the motion from the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. As he acknowledges, this is a very personal type of motion, a motion that touches so many hearts across the province, so many hearts in this Legislature, and I am, of course, no exception.

I want to start to talk a bit about how important it is to raise awareness in declaring a month—raising awareness so we can provide greater research, greater support to the families when they're supporting a child who has cancer.

We had a very unprecedented gift happen at my local community hospital, Toronto East General Hospital. A local family donated \$50 million to the hospital in memory of their son Michael, who died of cancer. Berna and Myron Garron made tremendous amounts of money in manufacturing. Their son was diagnosed at seven years old, had over five years of extensive treatments, and eventually he succumbed at 13. He was lying on his deathbed, and he said to his mother, "I'm so worried that I will be forgotten." His mother said, "Don't worry. We will never forget you." They put up \$50 million in his memory, and in his honour we've renamed the Toronto East General Hospital the Michael Garron Hospital, as part of the Toronto East Health Network.

As we dropped the veil on that renaming, I was struck by how powerfully I felt the loss of not their son, who I didn't know, but of my brother Bruce Thomas Aidan Potts, who died in a car accident—actually, he was in a coma for 10 years before he succumbed—and of my nephew Jason Gareth Thomas Potts, who was diagnosed with brain cancer at about three and died at 12. He went through incredible treatments, and he was such an incredible spirit. I recognize how sometimes cancer affects families in broader ways than just the cancer. His older brother, so depressed when the cancer came back for the third time, died of self-inflicted wounds. I remember my nephew on his sickbed, saying, "Why did my brother take his life? I told him—doesn't he know?—it always gets better." Those were the near-dying words of my nephew as he was remembering his brother.

I'm so delighted that you brought this piece forward, because bringing greater awareness in September to remember the lives of our young ones is what I was thinking about as we revealed that flag. It's not just about their son; it's about us all remembering those who died young in our lives.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further questions and comments? The member from Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Ajax-Pickering, continuing that time. I acknowledge and thank the member across the floor from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. It's a great effort he has put forward. And I thank my colleague MPP Potts for giving me a minute and a half at the end. I just wanted to mention a couple of quick things.

In this House, there is a plethora of people who contribute to those people who need help. Virtually everyone here falls in that category, and they do a great job, as does the presenter today.

I was just looking at—because it is childhood cancer—a note from Childhood Cancer Canada in reference to the 23rd annual charity golf tournament that my family runs. We have thanks from them for helping to support the 10,000 kids and their families across Canada who are bravely battling cancer. We feel very humbled and very proud to be part of that—my wife, Donna, Monica Hickey, Ray Hickey. Throughout that whole process we contribute to 20 charities. It is a charitable tournament, but the one that hurts you the most in the heart is when children are involved.

I just have to tell you, I'm very proud to stand with the rest of you today and speak in favour of this. I acknowledge very much the original presenter.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Whitby-Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'd like to thank the hard-working member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for bringing forward this important resolution.

As we've heard quite eloquently from other members of the Legislature, all of us in this Legislature know someone whose life has been affected by cancer, Speaker. When it's a child whose battle it becomes, the impact is even more devastating.

There's no question that in the past few decades we've made great leaps in detecting and treating this terrible disease, yet even with those advancements, the journey towards eradicating cancer forever is not over.

Near my riding of Whitby-Oshawa, the R.S. McLaughlin Durham Regional Cancer Centre serves over 100,000 families in and around Durham region. I say "families" because when a loved one suffers from this disease, it's a stressful time for the whole family. In the case of youth dealing with life after treatment, these types of centres offer dedicated service from medical professionals to help patients and families.

However, even when a patient's days are darkest, there's hope, Speaker; there's hope. We see this in the way our communities come together in the face of these challenges; for example, with the Terry Fox Run, which is upcoming in September.

While childhood cancer is not a new issue, in this Legislature we have a unique opportunity this afternoon, Speaker, to bring support to those children who are suffering and the families that are supporting them by putting a spotlight on this issue.

No child should ever have to face cancer alone, should they? By proclaiming the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, we will continue to

encourage our communities to aid in the fight against this dreadful disease. I spoke earlier about the Terry Fox Run, which will be run in 2016 for the 36th consecutive year. It's long been a symbol of hope and a chance for individuals and communities across our great province to come together to raise funds and continue to fight against cancer.

Unfortunately, cancer stands as the number one cause of disease-related death for children under the age of 14. Tragically, one in five of these children will die and two in three will suffer long-term effects as a consequence of dealing with this disease in their youth.

I'm encouraged, Speaker, by the universal agreement that I hear from members of the Legislature on this important resolution. Going forward, we have an opportunity again this afternoon to ensure that no child should ever have to face cancer alone, and we will be able to encourage our communities particularly in fighting against this dreadful disease.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to wrap up.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I had mentioned to you before, I'd like to correct my record. I believe in my emotional state I said that Neal actually rang the bells at the CN Tower and also the Toronto Stock Exchange. I know he was wanting to do that, and I can tell you if he had his way he'd light up every light in Toronto and across the province. And that may just come in the future.

I'd like to thank my colleagues for all of your personal stories: the members from Algoma–Manitoulin, Kitchener–Waterloo, Burlington, Halton, Beaches–East York, Ajax–Pickering, Thornhill, Whitby–Oshawa and York–Simcoe. Our health critic, Jeff Yurek, from Elgin–Middlesex–London also wanted to speak, but we just couldn't fit him in. But he's a big proponent.

I want to thank all of the staff, all the volunteers, the donors, the doctors, nurses—every single health care practitioner that is out there—and especially the volunteers who help along the way to try to help the families in their time of need.

We all need a spirit of hope, we all need something to grab on to. Again, I want to acknowledge the efforts of Neal Rourke, particularly, and all of the people that I mentioned today. I'm not going to go through the list of names again, but thank you so much for all that you do.

This truly is my way of being part of the legacy. On behalf of Neal and Rosanne Rourke and their son Brendan, and of Conah Higgins, his mom Dawn, his dad David, and his little sister Tyler “Tilley” Higgin, you truly are not allowing them to go without serving and helping others. It's a legacy that you should be proud of. It's a legacy that everyone in this House should be proud of—to help. Cancer can be beaten. As my hero Terry Fox said, it must stop somewhere. It will be beaten.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We'll deal with the vote on this motion a little bit later.

1420

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT
ACT (NUMBER PLATES
AND CARRYING RACKS), 2016
LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DE LA ROUTE (PLAQUES
D'IMMATRICULATION ET SUPPORTS
DE TRANSPORT)

Mr. Norm Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 191, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to number plates and carrying racks / Projet de loi 191, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui a trait aux plaques d'immatriculation et aux supports de transport.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to begin by welcoming some constituents from Parry Sound–Muskoka to the Legislature: Stephen Cairns and his wife, Carol Cairns, and friend Mike Forth are here in the members' gallery today.

Stephen and his wife, last year, were driving to Niagara-on-the-Lake with their bicycle rack mounted on the back of their vehicle, looking forward to enjoying some cycling in the beautiful area of our province. They got onto the 407, and a friendly OPP officer pulled them over for having a rack obscuring the licence plate on the back of their vehicle, which happens to be against the law in the province of Ontario. They did have a transponder on board, so they weren't trying to avoid the fee for using the 407, and they did explain that to the OPP officer, but they were charged anyway. So I have that one incident, and I'll come back to that, hopefully, if I have time.

A few years back, I had Ian Dawes from Ecclestone Cycle, who, incidentally, is the son-in-law of the Minister of Education here in the province of Ontario and has a cycle shop in Bracebridge. He called my constituency office saying that he'd had some customers who had been stopped by police for having bicycle racks obscuring their licence plate.

Sylvia Jones wrote to the minister and copied me, saying—this is her letter:

“I have received several inquiries from Dufferin–Caledon drivers who have received tickets because a bicycle rack was obstructing the rear licence plate.

“Rear-mounted bicycle racks are a popular item for bicycle enthusiasts because of ease of installation and use. Many Ontarians who want to transport their bikes to and from trails and paths cannot easily lift their bicycle to a roof-mounted rack. The availability of rear-mounted bicycle racks leads sellers and purchasers to believe they are 100% allowable.”

She goes on to say: “Minister, the province is promoting and encouraging active living, but the rules sur-

rounding transportation [are] causing confusion. I believe the legislation needs to be clarified to ensure cyclists can safely and legally transport their bicycles throughout the province.”

Surprise, surprise: I agree with her letter. That’s why I have brought forward this legislation, co-sponsored by the member from Burlington, to allow for regulations to provide an exemption for rear-mounted bicycle racks.

I might note that other jurisdictions do allow for exemptions. For example, the state of Utah allows, “Licence plates may be reasonably obscured by a trailer hitch, a wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier, a trailer being towed by the vehicle, a bicycle rack, ski rack, or luggage rack, or a similar cargo-carrying device.” There are many other jurisdictions that do allow for this.

I wanted to go on and mention that in the case of my constituent, he and his wife pointed out that they purchased their bicycle rack at Canadian Tire. They’re sold all over the place, and thousands of people have these racks. In fact, I have one myself, and I’ve done the same trip they talked about, going with my wife to Niagara-on-the-Lake. We did a similar trip to Prince Edward county, completely unaware that we were breaking the law. Thousands of people do that. When you buy it at Canadian Tire, it doesn’t have a big sign on it saying, “This may be illegal when you put it on your vehicle.” You have to buy it, get it home, open it and read the owner’s manual, and there in fine print it says, “In some jurisdictions this might not be legal.” I don’t think that’s very fair to the consumer. It’s my feeling that when you have a law that many people are inadvertently breaking without realizing they’re breaking the law, it’s a law that really should be changed. That’s what this private member’s bill is about.

Madam Speaker, I guess I’d just like to come back to the Cairns case and mention that in their case, they didn’t know they were breaking the law. They got pulled over, they got charged, and then they had to go to court. They had to come from Muskoka, first of all, for one trip down just to let them know they were going to fight the case, and then another day back down to Vaughan to go to court over the case. Then, when they got to court, they basically won the case in part because of the fact that it was obvious they weren’t trying to avoid paying the fee to go on the 407—but also when they produced pictures of OPP vehicles with similar racks mounted on the backs of their vehicles being used around the province.

I just think this makes sense, to make a change that will make it legal to have rear-mounted bicycle racks, and other racks; it’s not just limited to bicycle racks. It would also allow for wheelchair and luggage racks in the province of Ontario. As the member from Burlington will agree, I’m sure, we’re trying to promote healthy living. We’re trying to promote safe cycling and we’re trying to make it easy for people to be able to use their bicycles. This is one small way of being able to do that.

Because this is co-sponsored by the member from Burlington, I will now hand it over to the member from Burlington to use the next six minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Burlington.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I’m absolutely delighted to join the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka in this important conversation, and to thank him for asking me to join him in it and in co-sponsoring the bill. I want to welcome his constituents here. I’m pleased to see you. Thank you for making the trip; it’s important to have you here.

Madam Speaker, as the member opposite mentioned, this is an important issue, an important conversation. Sometimes, some of the issues that we raise here in private members’ time are personal to us all. I know and I will speak to the member opposite’s commitment to cycling, and my own. This is something that is well worth discussing, so I’m proud to be here.

That said, issues related to cycling in Ontario, as I mentioned, are close to my heart. Road safety and the safety of cyclists across the province are important issues for me. But this issue isn’t entirely about cycling in a way, because rear racks on cars can carry all kinds of things: skis, surfboards or sometimes even wheelchairs and mobility devices.

But it does underscore an important fact, and that’s that people who do choose to cycle in our province, whether they’re doing so as a means of daily transportation, cycling tourism, recreation—as the member opposite mentioned, there are so many benefits to cycling. It’s important and timely that we have this conversation today, because our government is encouraging Ontarians to cycle even more and investing heavily in cycling infrastructure, changes to the Highway Traffic Act and cycling-related programs. Again, it’s an important debate and a timely one.

The safety of our roads and those who use them is always the highest priority for our government. As members well know, we have the safest roads in North America, and we’re proud of that.

My history as a cycling advocate is known to the members of this House, Speaker. It’s a robust one. It’s twinned with my commitment to road safety. Why? Because prior to my election, of course, in 2014, my commitment to cycling advocacy was promoted by a personal loss when my spouse, OPP Sergeant Greg Stobbart, was killed in a cycling tragedy.

Again, as someone who was married to a police officer, I shared his passion for cycling, but I also shared his commitment to and passion for road safety, because he spent close to 25 years as a police officer. As the member opposite must know, because his spouse is also an officer, when you live with a police officer, these issues touch you in an even more profound way.

We want to encourage people to cycle and cycle even more. As the member opposite mentioned, we want to help people discover the benefits of getting on their bikes, and safety is paramount to us, of course.

We know that cycling is growing. Almost three million Ontarians choose to ride their bikes at least once a week; 32% of them ride their bikes at least monthly, and

of those, 4% say they ride a bike daily, with an additional 28% riding weekly. Almost 600,000 people in this province are riding their bikes every day, and that's critically important.

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Cycling tourism is also an important conversation that we're having in Ontario. Why? Because we look to Quebec, which has invested over \$200 million in the Route verte. It brings them \$134 million in return on that investment. Ontario wants to realize some of those revenues, and we want our people to be cycling.

We know, too, that just south of us, in the United States, they have a 50,000-mile bike route that they're planning and investing in. Cycling adds an astounding \$49 billion to the US economy.

As part of our government's #CycleON strategy, released in 2013, my colleague the MPP for Cambridge and PA to the Minister of Transportation recently announced the recipients of the Ontario Municipal Cycling Infrastructure Program and the Cycling Training Fund, two new programs designed to promote cycling and cycling safety in our province. There were over 100 municipalities—150, actually—that applied to that fund. It was a \$10-million fund. This is good news, and evidence of the pent-up demand that cycling is in our province.

The other issue that comes to mind in this debate today is education and awareness. I remember talking to the member opposite about that, too. Why? Because Ontarians who choose to carry their bicycle, their luggage or any other equipment on the back of their vehicle are likely unaware that they are in contravention of the act; they don't know that their plates were not visible. I think that's an important thing to mention, because opportunities like this debate carry the inherent possibility to educate Ontarians, but also the debate going forward, which today's discussion is going to initiate, provides us with that ongoing opportunity to really decide how we're going to fix this situation and how we're going to bring the issue to the minds of Ontarians that this is very important for them to know.

What does this tell us? It tells us that we need a solution, and that a solution is worth exploring. On the face of it, I know and I understand that allowing an exemption, which is one option, might seem like a straightforward solution. But it's worth noting that, in doing so, there might be unintended consequences. So I'm a little bit torn, because I want this issue to be explored; I want us to find a solution. Again, I think that, moving forward, a broader consultation is necessary; perhaps a discussion at committee, which I would absolutely welcome.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm aware of the issues and dangers of road safety and enforcement because of my late husband. We know, too, that it's important for front and rear licence plates to be visible. Again, how do we engineer that? How do we make it happen? Of course, the member opposite mentioned the 407. The people here today experience that. There are red light cameras. The

Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has done a presentation to the government on this issue and reminded us that we need to find solutions.

But we also understand that, at its core, the intention of this bill is to promote cycling in Ontario, and again, I heartily embrace that.

As I was preparing for today's discussion, I found some really interesting opportunities online for in-vehicle technologies that exist in Europe. I think those are worth exploring. We should talk to vehicle manufacturers and cycling equipment manufacturers.

I look forward to that robust debate, and I want to thank the member opposite again for asking me to join him and for his cycling advocacy in his riding and beyond.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words with regard to Norm Miller's—the Parry Sound–Muskoka member's—Bill 191 on cycling. I think it's a great opportunity to show the people of Ontario that when good ideas come forward, we can all get behind the piece of legislation and share that, and ensure that safety becomes paramount.

This bill seems like a pretty good piece of common sense legislation in the fact that people need to transport their bikes to certain areas in order to participate in cycling, and a hindrance, obviously, is the fact that these racks to mount bikes on the back are obscuring their licence plates and, at the end of the day, they could have a ticket.

I think this is an easy solution, and I hope the government ensures that this bill gets through committee and back for third reading as soon as possible. I'm hoping that we can have this bill legislated before we break in the second week of June. We have lots of time, and I think this bill should become a priority.

I think that the cycling strategy is important, and I commend the government for pushing forward with improving cycling. However, my riding was unsuccessful with the grants that were given out, and there are a lot of upset cyclists in my area, because St. Thomas and Elgin county are pretty rural and the roads were never really built to put cyclists on, and they're so important to the people who like to cycle every day, to get out and ride, but they want to be safe.

Elgin county has created a cycle path or bike lane on Highway 4 at Sunset Drive over the last few years. I think that's great. They're connecting Port Bruce to Port Stanley with widened roads to make it safer, but there are quite a few areas in our area where people like to ride but they aren't able to do so safely; they do so at their own risk. I've seen some of the drivers in our area, and I don't cycle on the roads mainly because of that.

Being lighthearted aside, though, in rural Ontario, to get to our trails, sometimes you have to put your bikes on a rack to get to the area you want to go to. The fact that

you can get a fine in order to get your bikes—if you can't fit them in the back of your truck. I have a pick-up truck so I throw the bikes in the back of the truck when I need to go somewhere. However, not everybody has that choice, and it might hinder them from riding.

My daughter and I like to go for rides in the area. However, the roads we live around—we choose to go on the sidewalk. Again, we could probably get a fine for doing that in our area too, but I'd rather risk that fine than the fact we put ourselves in danger.

I know that the member from Cambridge has offered to look at the next proposal that my area puts in for the next amount of grants, if they still have them. We're going to take her up on that. We need to have that money for our area because we don't have a huge tax base. We've lost a lot of manufacturing. We won't say it was caused by this government—but at least they're coming back with some cycling infrastructure money. We'd like to get some share of that in order to improve it.

I also, at this time, just want to give a call-out to the cycling shops in my area because sometimes people in my riding don't know where to go. My grandfather came from Poland in the late 1920s. He was known as Pop to the neighbourhood. What he would do is fix everyone's bike, growing up, and he built the first two bikes that I rode. He became known as Pop. I called him Pop; everyone called him Pop in the city, because he fixed bikes. But nowadays we don't have that many Pops in the area to fix bikes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's because of the College of Trades.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The College of Trades may have been a cause of that; thanks, Mr. Hudak.

Anyway, we have Paul's Bicycle Repair and Sports Exchange on Ross Street. It's an old-fashioned bike shop; you can go in there and talk to Paul. He always has his blue smock on, ready to make repairs. We have the hi-tech Trek shop. Trek has opened up in the northern part of my riding, in south London.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Nice.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Nice shop; I've been in there checking it out.

I have Mountain Equipment Co-op in my area, which has a lot of bike programs they've put together. However, it is moving out of my riding, a little further north. It will probably be in the member from London–Fanshawe's riding come September, when they have their new building.

I just want to say: Let's pass this bill really quickly. It makes sense to remove any barrier we can to ensure that people have access to cycling.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to tell the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London that if there is money to be dished out, there's a lot of room for it in Algoma–Manitoulin. I just want to say that.

I just noticed in the crowd with us a very good friend of mine. I spent a very pleasant evening a couple of days

ago having supper with him, reminiscing over a few discussions and talking about stuff. I want to introduce Stew Kiff to the House today. Welcome, Stew Kiff. I'm glad you're joining us.

Again, I want to commend the member from—where are you, my friend?

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, Parry Sound–Muskoka. He brings a very important piece of legislation forward when it comes to actually looking at developing tourism and attracting economic development to many areas. The cycling communities are growing at a very fast pace throughout Ontario. They are also growing at a very fast pace in northern Ontario; both winter and summer enthusiasts are out there cycling regularly.

I've been newly minted as the co-chair for the all-party cycling caucus, and I work very closely with my friends—and I can say “my friends”—Eleanor and Norm when we're talking about strategies for the cycling community. It was great that all three of us, along with our critics—we were all at the Ontario Bike Summit, where I was enlightened on a lot of information that was there.

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It was at that point in time that I informed everybody at the summit that I had decided to make some serious health-changing decisions. I'm glad that the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton is here, because he actually recorded a promise that I had made when I was out at the bike summit. I hadn't been on a bike in, oh, I would say 20-plus years; it had been a long time. By the end of that evening, I told the delegates that were there that I would get out, get on a bike, ring a bell and do a little bit of pedalling. I did go out, the member did record me and it was a fantastic ride that I did take down on Yonge Street here in Toronto.

I want to put a shout-out for the group MICA out of Manitoulin Island, the Manitoulin Island Cycling Advocates. They are going to be having the Manitoulin Island cycling passage, which is going to be held on June 4 and 5, I believe, of this summer. There are a vast amount of individuals that come from southern Ontario, who jump on the Chi-Cheemaun and come and enjoy the cycling routes that are there on Manitoulin Island. We receive them wholeheartedly each and every summer and have a wonderful time hosting them at the vast bed and breakfasts and hotels that we have on Manitoulin Island.

Which brings me to talk about what the member is bringing forward. Basically, we think, from where I stand, it is actual common sense. If you look at a bike rack, what's the difference between a bike rack or a Ski-Doo trailer? You're still not looking at the plate. It makes sense that you're going to have your Ski-Doos on your trailer, but you can't see the plate that is being covered, because most of the time it's covered with snow. The bike rack is just making good sense. Again, it's promoting good, healthy options as far as what is needed in many of our communities across this province.

I want to put a shout-out to Maja from MICA, from Manitoulin Island, who has been working very hard on

behalf of the group in order to establish another thing that we think is a possibility. We put the petition forward to the Minister of Transportation, as far as looking at this as a pilot project. What we'd like to use, in order to bring more cycling enthusiasts, not only to Manitoulin Island but across the province, are the existing signs that are on the cycling routes across Manitoulin Island. Why? It gives an opportunity to the cycling communities to know exactly where they're going, because individuals that are coming to those areas sometimes get off-course. Having the pilot project so that we can establish it there, to see if it actually works and helps the cycling community to get to and from their destination, I think would be a very positive step forward, such as the common sense that we have with this particular piece of legislation. It would be a very welcome issue going forward.

There's the other thing that we also are always diligent on, and it is making sure that when we are working on infrastructure we have those paved shoulders. I've been working with the minister, and his assistant as well, to make sure that in upcoming projects, if the opportunity is there, we make sure that those paved shoulders are there. I have to say that on Manitoulin Island we've almost got the loop done. We're working very hard to finish the east end of the island, to make sure that with the upcoming resurfacing that's happening on the highways, shoulders are included. This is very key, because now we have the trail up the middle. We have the one on the west side, but if we can get the east side as well, that completes an exact cycle, and individuals can really enjoy and benefit from the culture on Manitoulin Island: have the full cycle, a short cycle, a little peek through, it's all there.

Again I don't hear enough talking about Manitoulin Island, because it's the largest freshwater island in the world. Why wouldn't we be talking about it? I'm always going to put a plug in for that. You're all welcome to join us for the passage on June 5, 6, 7. Come enjoy the culture that we have; come and enjoy the North Shore. There are many cycling community activists from Sault Ste. Marie all the way to Sudbury. We've almost got that area included within the cycling community, Madam Speaker. I'm looking forward, over the course of the summer, now that I am the co-chair of the all-party cycling community, to going out and actually engaging with all of these discussions to continue my education. I'm glad that my friends Eleanor and Norm are always going to be there to help me out with this. I look to be an advocate with them for the cycling community as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Cambridge.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise today to add some more comments to this wonderful debate this afternoon on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge. I also wanted to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Burlington for bringing forward this bill this afternoon—to be able to discuss one of my favourite topics, which is cycling.

Madam Speaker, if you will, I know that the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, at the bike summit that I also

attended, made the commitment that he was going to get out on the bike, and I want to commend him that he's already taken up the challenge.

Here's the other challenge: He talks about all the great work that we've been doing as a province to help complete some of the trails, especially on Manitoulin Island. There's been some provincial infrastructure cycling money to be able to complete some of that. If he's going to take up the challenge, and I get up there to do that trail, I'm wondering if the member will agree to come out on the trail with me at the time.

It's great today to comment about that. I have to say that it's great to hear some of the really positive comments that we've got from many members in the House this afternoon who are actually part of the cycling caucus. I really appreciate the support.

One of the reasons that I love this topic is because I'm the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, and the cycling strategy of Ontario is my file and in my mandate letter. I've had the opportunity, for almost two years now, to be able to work on this file and to look at various ways that we can get more people out on their bike.

As we know, Madam Speaker, right now, just about three million people hop on their bike in Ontario at least once a week. Some of those folks are there daily. They're cycling and they're commuting, and they very much understand a lot of the benefits of cycling, such as the health benefits from the exercise; when you're on a bike, there's no greenhouse gas emissions being produced; it's great for tourism; it's great for just getting out and around and being social; and, also, a great way to see our province.

I also wanted to talk about road safety, because being out on the bike and sharing the road with other road users brings me back to the transportation file. I have to say that I'm enormously proud of our Ministry of Transportation. MTO has really worked very, very hard over the last few decades to ensure that we have some of the best and safest roads in North America to travel on, whether you're a pedestrian, a cyclist or a driver.

I've got to say that, over the last 10 years, Ontario has been first or second in North America as one of the safest jurisdictions in road safety, and that's something that we can be enormously proud of. The safety of our roads is always important to us. We know that there's more work that can be done, and it continues to be one of our highest priorities.

We were very pleased, last year, to be able to bring forward the Making Ontario's Roads Safer act, Bill 31, which had a lot of pieces of legislation that really worked hard to ensure that it's safer for our cyclists to be on the road with that. We wanted to just reiterate some of those provisions that are now coming on to our roads. It's not only protecting drivers, but our cyclists.

When we're talking about dooring, which is the act when somebody opens their car door into the path of an oncoming cyclist, those fines and some of the demerit points have been increased for drivers, upon conviction,

for dooring cyclists. If that happens, they now face a fine range of \$300 to \$1,000 and, potentially, three demerit points.

Drivers of motor vehicles must also now maintain a minimum of one-metre safe passing, where practical, when passing cyclists. The fine range for that offence has been increased to \$60 to \$500 and two demerit points, if convicted.

In addition to these items, we now allow cyclists to ride on the paved shoulders of unrestricted highways. I know that the member from Algoma–Manitoulin was talking about paved shoulders. On unrestricted highways now, cyclists can get out there. I know that some of the cycling infrastructure money that has gone forward from the province has been to address some of the areas in the province that needed more paved shoulders.

In addition to all that work, we've got the ability now to allow contraflow bicycle lanes on one-way roads. I know that here in the city of Toronto, there are several instances where that's going to be allowed.

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I just wanted to do a shout-out today. I know that yesterday Toronto city council approved the addition of cycling lanes on Bloor Street, and I think that that's a very good sign that we're now really putting cycling forward as a very effective mode of transportation. I didn't even talk about the good things that happen when you're out of the car: less congestion, fewer cars on the road and better transit options. That really helps those of us who need to be commuting. So we have taken strong action in a number of different ways to protect cycling.

I also wanted to identify some of the other things that we've been doing. The cycling strategy, the #CycleON Action Plan 1.0 that was released in 2014, had a number of action items that we've been delivering on steadily since that was released. One of the things that we were talking about was infrastructure money. There was \$25 million that was earmarked in that cycling strategy for infrastructure: \$15 million worth, which I've already talked about, in terms of improving provincial roads, but another \$10 million that was identified under the Ontario municipal cycling infrastructure fund.

On March 11, I was able to announce the first group of recipients of these monies in Cambridge. I was very proud that Waterloo region had three municipalities that were able to go ahead and receive their funds from this particular fund to be able to improve the infrastructure. In total, a number of my colleagues have also announced some of those funds, and it was actually up to about 37 municipalities that received this—a lot of interest, and I know we'll be looking forward to looking at other programs down the way.

The other monied fund that we have been releasing recently in the last year or two has been regarding the Cycling Training Fund, and that helps to identify areas where cycling education and making cycling safer have been beneficial.

When I'm looking at Bill 191 that we're discussing this afternoon, Madam Speaker, I find that, yes, the two

members have identified an issue in Ontario. I know the member for Burlington was saying that it's not just bike racks on the back that may obscure licence plates, but also other things, including luggage racks with big boxes or suitcases on the back, that may do that. So it is important to bring this bill forward so that we can start discussing this among the ministries that are affected by this and be able to have this discussion as to what kind of solutions we can bring forward.

Visibility is something that I know is very important, for obvious reasons, but also something that we need to resolve, because the province really does support cycling in the province and we need to identify some of the solutions. Clearly, visible licence plates are important for red light cameras as well as the 407.

I very much understand that the thrust of this bill is there to make sure that we can continue to have more and more cyclists in the province of Ontario, but also to identify those areas where we need to find a solution that works for all parties. I think it's important to pass this this afternoon, get it into committee and start looking at some of the solutions that would alleviate the problem but also allow more people in Ontario to be able to hop on their bikes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's an honour to stand to speak to Bill 191, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act. I'm very pleased to support this bill, co-sponsored by our member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and the member from Burlington. I think this is an opportunity to see the parties come together on such a wonderful topic.

Speaker, as you've heard, as the government of Ontario continues to invest in cycling, it's important to remove the barriers to accessing cycling and active transportation opportunities. I think that's the really key point here: The laws need to keep up with the demand and the changes that have been made through the use of these racks and that type of thing. As the member from Parry Sound talked about earlier, the one particular court case was waived, if you will, as the OPP cars themselves have their plates covered. So we understand why, and we understand that this is important to do.

I think what I'd rather spend time chatting about is the exciting sport and hobby and fun of cycling for families. We heard a few minutes ago about the Ontario Municipal Cycling Infrastructure Program. North Bay did receive the maximum, \$300,000, for that, so we will have an additional investment into our trails. Quite recently, we also announced, just a couple of Fridays ago, a large Trillium Fund grant for our trails in North Bay, and we'll be seeing those trails enhanced and expanded.

They are wonderfully friendly. When I served as mayor of the city of North Bay back in 2003, in those years, we spent a tremendous amount of time building cycling trails through our parks and through our municipality. You can cycle from one end of the city all the way down to where I live, 20 miles south of North Bay, into Corbeil. You can cycle past Corbeil and on. It's

a phenomenal opportunity. In fact, our mayor, Bill Vrebosch of Corbeil—he has been a great mayor for more than 30 years in Corbeil—really lobbied hard with the province when they were repaving Highway 94 in Corbeil, right down in front of my residence, to have cycling trails paved three or more feet wide on both sides of the highway. That was a really positive move. He said, “Look, you’re paving the highway anyway. Let’s do an estimate of the amount of asphalt that we’d need to actually put bicycle lanes on both sides of the entire extent of Highway 94.” Today, you can bicycle either way, by my place now, on a major highway. I think that’s a real improvement.

For all of those cyclists who like to drive there and then bike, I will continue to support this wonderful bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Michael Coteau: He’s always on his bike.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: As the member across has indicated, I’m always on my bike. I love cycling. I think it’s an important thing. I’m honoured to stand in support of this bill.

First and foremost, let’s give credit where credit is due. We need to acknowledge the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for his leadership on this, and the member from Burlington for supporting this initiative. We need a shout-out on a couple of great organizations as well: again, back to the member from Burlington for the Share the Road Cycling Coalition, which does phenomenal work, and our co-chairs—which you’ve heard from all the members—our own co-chair from Algoma–Manitoulin spoke very passionately about his newfound love for cycling, and I was honoured to tape him in his inaugural ride, which was a great thing to see. He looks good on his bike—

Interjection: It’s on YouTube.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It’s on YouTube, I think. It’s on Facebook, at least. It’s on Facebook and Twitter. We can get that up on YouTube as well.

Anyway, a couple of things: The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka mentioned that this was one small step to make cycling easier. I think he was being very humble about it. Though it may be a small step, it speaks to a larger picture. The larger picture is this: We need to make cycling easier. We need to make the healthier choice in life, in every aspect of life, the easier choice.

I went to an amazing event talking about health promotion. All the advocates, whether they were doctors or health promoters, talked about: In life, people are drawn to the easier choice. If it’s easier to take the elevator, they’ll take the elevator. But if you make a building where stairs are very easy to access and they’re front and centre and they’re beautiful, people are more likely to take the stairs. If you hide the stairs in the back corner of a building and it’s hard to find and it’s difficult to get to, people will be less likely to use the stairs. So in

general, whether it’s nutrition or whether it’s activities, if you make healthier choices easier, people will make those decisions.

With cycling, we should ensure that there’s no barrier to cycling. If people want to, for recreational purposes, take their bikes out to a certain area, to a rural community or a community with a beautiful biking trail along the river, along the lake, they should be able to do that, and we should not create barriers for them.

1500

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that people who travel with their bicycles are not going to be penalized for doing so. That’s an amazing initiative, an important initiative, and it speaks to that broader concept of how we can make cycling easier to do and more accessible in our city. It’s an important bill, and I support it.

I think the story, the real-life example, was very poignant. It’s very important to provide real-life examples of people who weren’t trying to evade the law in any way. In fact, they had the transponder. I think it’s an important point to point out—that they were travelling on the 407, but they had the transponder, so they weren’t trying to avoid any tolls. But they were charged and given a highway traffic offence for something where they weren’t really trying to evade the law; they were just trying to engage in an activity that many people engage in. I think it’s absolutely important.

When we talk about the cycling strategy, there are a number of different areas. We talk about Toronto: I also want to give a shout-out to city council for passing that amazing initiative to be able to have bicycles on Bloor. It has been the work of advocates for a number of years, and I thank the member across for mentioning that. I know that our own leader Jack Layton was one of the champions behind this as well, but there are a number of people, and we should give credit to all the people who have been tireless in their advocacy to ensure that was brought back. I know there was some concern around other areas where there were cycling lanes that were in existence and that were taken out, and now we’re wanting to see them come back. Bicycles on Bloor is an amazing initiative.

When we look at cycling in communities where there is a greater percentage of people who are cyclists and when we look at the network of not only trails, but bike lanes, what we need to do is make sure that they connect, that they provide a grid, so you can actually get to places where you want to go in a way that’s safe, and you feel secure. We need to connect to different pathways. Bloor is an amazing connecting pathway; it criss-crosses the city in a very strategic way. But we need to make sure that the other bike lanes also intersect in a way that you can actually travel around the city and avoid some of the areas which are more difficult to ride in.

I know I ride on roads all time, and I probably wouldn’t want people who are less experienced to get on those roads, because when you don’t have a bicycle lane, it makes you feel less comfortable and you feel a little bit intimidated with cars zipping by you. When you have

that protected lane, it makes you feel more comfortable. We know, and studies show very clearly, that the more protected lanes you have, the more safe and secure the lanes are, the more people get out and bicycle. One of the major barriers to cycling for most people is that they feel that it's something that they're afraid to do. They feel like cycling in a city is dangerous and scary. If that's the barrier, we need to do everything we can to get rid of that barrier. Anyway, I'm a big supporter of this.

Another thing: I want to give a shout-out to the suburbs—because in the suburbs we have vast areas. They're sprawling, but one of the saving graces is that if we could bring in more cycling lanes into the suburbs, we could make those cities more livable. Brampton needs more cycling, as well as the rest of Peel, as well as the rest of the entire GTA.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'm pleased today to join the debate on Bill 191.

The cycling community is very strong in the Brampton–Springdale community, and I've had the opportunity to meet with them on a number of occasions. They're strong advocates for a better cycling community and to provide more options for our cycling community. They're actually hosting a wonderful event in Brampton on June 18 called Bike the Creek, which I look forward to participating in, as I did last year. I'm not as much of a cyclist as some of my colleagues, but last year I had the opportunity to cycle with Bike the Creek for about 15 kilometres. This year, I'm hoping to do the full 40K.

The cycling community in Brampton was very excited when we did receive funding just recently. We received maximum funding to improve infrastructure projects and to improve existing biking paths in Brampton. This is a very important project for us; it was a gap that they were going to be closing under the bridge of the 407 and the 401.

We want to ensure that people in our biking and cycling community are safe, and we want them to have all the benefits that they can to be able to ride and enjoy and to encourage more people to cycle in our communities. It's environmentally friendly, and it's definitely a separate option—it's a new and exciting option for people.

Many municipalities from across the province submitted expressions of interest when they submitted for the infrastructure. We were able to get it. I'm also proud to say that the city of Brampton supported that by meeting it dollar for dollar so that we could have a more firm investment and continue our projects.

I understand that this bill proposes that if a carrying rack, such as a bicycle rack, is mounted to the rear of a vehicle, that the individual should still be able to drive their vehicle on the highway, even if the rack obscures the licence plate. This is a very interesting proposal, and I understand it has support from Ontario's cycling community.

We know it's important for both our front and rear licence plates to be visible for a few reasons. Firstly, it allows for law enforcement officers to be able to see. But as long as the plate is visible, we should allow this opportunity. It gives people more opportunities, and it allows them to travel with their bikes, go to different areas and have their bikes available to them.

I'm supportive of this proposal and I look forward to it passing, so that the cycling community has even more options and the cycling community can continue to grow. I know that approximately three million people cycle once a week right now, and if we allow things like this to happen, it will only grow.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: I, too, was going to introduce Stewart Kiff, but he has not invited me over for dinner, so I'm going to hold that off for another time.

It's an absolute pleasure to speak to Bill 191, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: I won't go there.

I'd like to commend my colleagues, from Parry Sound, Norm Miller, and Eleanor McMahon from Burlington for this. It's a good bill. It's one about safety. It's one that I think, as one of my other colleagues said, is pretty easy to implement and we should move on.

I'm going to spend most of my time talking about the benefits of activity. Madam Speaker, I don't know if you know, but I was a recreation director in my first career. I'm still a big promoter of that. The area of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is one of those areas where we certainly promote and encourage everyone to come and visit us and enjoy because we're one of the top destinations in Ontario for people who lead an active lifestyle.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Groundhogs even—good. Without a shadow of a doubt, our groundhogs are wonderful. Thanks for bringing that up, Mr. Hudak. I know you always enjoyed your visits to Wiarton on February 2, although you did not cycle that day.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: That day.

My colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin as well—they have a great area up there. MICA, I believe it is, Manitoulin Island cycling association. A lot of people, particularly down here in the GTA, from London, Kitchener and Parry Sound, they even come around the horn, come through my riding. They depart from the most northern spot in southern Ontario, Tobermory, and go across on the Chi-Cheemaun, the big canoe, to Manitoulin Island, and enjoy it there.

But I'm going to get back to Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I've given him the plug he needed, and we get along well.

Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has some of the best recreational trails for biking, ATVing, cross-country skiing, equestrian riding, snowmobiling, trail running and snowshoeing. You name it and you can do it in Bruce–

Grey–Owen Sound. We're home to the Georgian Trail, the Tom Thomson Trail, the Rail Trail and, of course, the Bruce Trail. The Bruce Trail is the oldest and longest continuous public footpath in Canada. It's 890 kilometres of connectivity and sustainable transportation. It is the only continuous public access to the Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, and attracts about 400,000 visits per year.

Trail use in my riding alone generates over \$24.5 million annually between Grey and Bruce, and it's one of the reasons that I'm actually supporting Bill 100. The tourism economy for our area and across our province is absolutely significant. We need to make sure that that piece of legislation—the minister has assured me that he'll listen to some of the amendments that are going to be made to make that bill even better and stronger and appease the people who have concerns about it now. So we're hoping that will happen.

I want to applaud the government and suggest they continue to invest in cycling infrastructure and remove barriers to accessing cycling and active transportation opportunities. As we all know, many people have to transport those bicycles. I believe my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London said that. He likes to go out cycling, but you have to transport the cycle sometimes to get to a safe spot, a trail, so you're not worried.

I want to acknowledge, again, my colleague from Burlington who, sadly, lost her husband, a police officer, to cycling. We need to encourage those safe opportunities for people to be able to get out, off the roads and onto the beaten path.

This bill aims to ease the regulations by allowing people to use bicycle racks on the back of their cars without the fear of being charged for having their licence plate obscured by the rack. Currently, the rules are not black and white. Some people have been ticketed for having their plates obscured by this type of bike rack. I believe my colleague from Parry Sound illustrated a very fine point there. There are ways that we should be able to do this.

I am a strong supporter of integrating healthy physical activity into everyday life and fostering that. I want to encourage and have everyone's support so that we can have active lifestyles and encourage everyone to get out, hit those trails, and this bill will help us to do that safely.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka to wrap up.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members who spoke to the bill, and to my co-chair, the member from Burlington, for supporting this bill.

1510

I'd like to begin by welcoming a good friend from Bracebridge, Muskoka: John de Koning, who is here visiting and interested in this debate, as well. I'm sure that he is going to become a big cyclist in the not-too-distant future.

I thank the members for their comments.

I'm a little envious of the member from Nipissing, who talked about the Ontario Municipal Cycling Infrastructure Program, because when I look down the list, I don't think any of it went to Parry Sound–Muskoka. We certainly have some good projects and asks that are out there. I know that we're working on the trail around Georgian Bay, which would go up Algoma–Manitoulin and then circle Georgian Bay.

When I went to the Parry Sound municipal meeting last week, the first mayor I met was actually talking to another mayor about Highway 124, saying that there's only one little section of 124 between Sundridge and Parry Sound that needs paved shoulders, and they're looking for the support of Dale Robinson of McDougall township to make that up.

In Carling township, there's a huge desire to have either a separate trail or a paved shoulder from the most popular provincial park in the province, Killbear Provincial Park, to the town of Parry Sound. That's a distance of about 30 kilometres. A good part of it does have safe riding conditions, but there's also Highway 559, which does not at this time.

Hopefully, in the future rounds, some of these very worthwhile projects will be looked upon kindly, and we will get some of that investment in Parry Sound–Muskoka, as well.

I think this bill allows us to fix a problem that does exist. I think that there are solutions. We've heard about challenges with the 407. I do believe that the 407 takes pictures of the front and rear licence plates, so that shouldn't be a problem, and I'm sure we can work around the red light situation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal with the vote at the end of private members' public business.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
INTO ACCESSIBLE PARKING
IN MUNICIPALITIES ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 CONCERNANT
LA COMMISSION D'ENQUÊTE
SUR LE STATIONNEMENT ACCESSIBLE
DANS LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Ms. Martow moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 187, An Act to establish a commission of inquiry into accessible parking in municipalities / Projet de loi 187, Loi visant la création d'une commission d'enquête sur le stationnement accessible dans les municipalités.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just want to comment on some amazing people who made the effort to come out today. When you see them up in the galleries—some people had to have a little bit of help climbing the stairs; some

people have scooters; some people have wheelchairs; some people have lots of friends with them.

I just want to mention, first, Paige Zaldin and her mom, Michelle. Paige was really the spearhead for this because, about five years ago, her mom, Michelle, got a parking ticket in Vaughan for parking where you're allowed to park in Toronto. She assumed that Vaughan, the municipality just bordering Toronto, had the same parking rules. Luckily, she didn't have to pay the ticket, I believe, because she found some kind of error in the licence plate number or the date. Michelle is also involved with the UJA accessibility committee, which is called Itanu.

We also have Peter Athanasopoulos from Spinal Cord Injury Ontario. He's the senior manager of public policy and government relations.

We have Louise Russo. A lot of you may recognize her name because she's a bit of a hero for a lot of people, not just because she was injured in, basically, a mafia shootout, but because of her advocacy work and her braveness in the face of what she went through. She founded WAVE, Working Against Violence Everyday, which I'm sure keeps her busy with all of her advocacy work. We all appreciate everything she's doing.

Wendy Murphy with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario is here, as well. She's a former reporter for Citytv.

Lynda Staples is also with Spinal Cord Injury Ontario.

Eddie Rice is the chairman of the Ontarians with disabilities committee of B'nai Brith.

I'm not sure if he's here yet: Patrick Bramm from Reena, which is for people with disabilities in the Jewish community. It's a very well-known organization in my riding.

Stewart Kiff: I'm just going to say my friend Stewart Kiff, who is here, because he has so many different jobs that he does. Dr. Iris Kulbatski: I went to a fantastic show of Wheel Dance, which is wheelchairs and able-bodied people who dance with them; she's the executive director of the organization. I also want to mention quickly David Lepofsky, chair of the AODA Alliance, who sent me lots of notice but, regretfully, couldn't be here today. He's a lawyer and a professor at York University.

I want to borrow a line from my colleague the member from York Simcoe. She's going to be speaking on this as well. Basically, what she said is that accessible parking needs to be accessible. That's what we're speaking about here today. Right now, we have parking rules that are set by municipalities in the best interests of the people who live in those municipalities. The problem is that people have enough challenges if they're dealing with mobility challenges of any type, whether visible or not visible, that they shouldn't be carrying around a stack of papers dealing with the different rules for different municipalities.

I'm not suggesting that we should order how municipalities set their parking rules; I'm just suggesting that we need to sit down—all the accessibility groups, some of which are represented here and some of which might be watching at home—and have those discussions with

the municipalities on how best to streamline and, where possible, have as much the same rules; and if the rules aren't the same, to maybe have a system of posting so that people will know, because in my opinion it shouldn't be that the rules south of Steeles or north of Steeles are so vastly different. Hopefully, people here are agreeing.

The other side of the coin is permits. We're seeing with the blitz by the Toronto police that went on earlier this year that close to half of the permits seem to be either counterfeit or being used fraudulently, and the system definitely needs some tightening up. There's a serious problem when people are trying to get somewhere and it's not easy, I'm sure, for them to get into their vehicle or their friend's or relative's vehicle. It's hard enough to get into the vehicle itself without arriving somewhere and not being able to find parking.

These are not patients; these are not sick people. These are people who want their independence and deserve their independence, and who deserve our compassion and help, but not our pity. We used to say "disabled parking," and I think it's sometimes hard to make that change. But words are very powerful, and there is a lot to be said for changing some of the terminology we use every day. I wouldn't punish somebody for saying "disabled parking" or "handicapped parking," but we all have to put our heads around the fact that it's not about sickness; it's about accessibility and having everybody in the community being part of that community.

I just want to mention the Toronto exemptions, in case people don't know. Some of them are that if it's not rush hour, you can park where it says "no parking." That is not available in most other municipalities in Ontario. You don't have to put money in the on-street meters, you don't need on-street permits—at my sister's house, you need an on-street permit—and there are no time limits. This is done to be fair to people, to help people and to show compassion for people who have mobility challenges. Unfortunately, other people in the community see this as an opportunity to either get away without paying or to somehow circumvent the time limits that are placed there.

We also have a lot of challenges in terms of public awareness and education. We always talk about kids in school being made aware of what it means to have accessible parking and permits. I have a feeling that if we're teaching kids that it's not right to use that permit when grandma is not in the car, those kids will speak up and, at least when they're in the car, I'm betting that their parents aren't going to dare do it. Parents, we all know, do behave better in front of children.

Maybe we have to get through to the kids and get them speaking and letting people know that it's not appropriate to say something if you see somebody who parks in handicapped parking: "You don't look like you have mobility challenges" or "I don't see a wheelchair." It's not the public's place to make those kinds of nasty comments. We hear that way too often. People can have challenges that might not be visible to us. But we can see where that's coming from, because too many people

know of fraud with accessibility permits and accessible parking, so when they see somebody they don't know or they don't see a wheelchair, they assume it's fraud.

1520

That's when we know we have a big problem here: If people see somebody parking in accessible parking and assume that there's some kind of fraud going on—maybe there is, but we don't want the public to feel that there's some kind of scam that they should be trying to get on. We want to nip this in the bud. We want to make sure that, going forward, people are treated respectfully and those spots are for where they're supposed to go.

I want to just read a couple of comments that I was given by people in terms of their challenges in terms of what they face. One is from Wendy Murphy herself, who is here:

“Confined to a wheelchair following a car accident in 1984, I have been around the disabled parking permit issue since its inception back in the early 1980s. I am saddened to see where it seems to have lost its initial purpose.

“Easy access becomes paramount when trying to maintain independence while in a wheelchair, most importantly when going about daily routines while driving. Close access to the entrance of public buildings is what the disabled parking permit was initially designed to offer those using wheelchairs. Today, the designated parking spots have often lost their size in dimensions, and their availability. These frustrations are escalated when weather conditions are difficult, such as winter.”

I think that that's what we need to get through to developers and the municipalities, who are now very often giving the developers permission to not put in as many parking spots. They are seeing higher density, and maybe there's transit going in the area, but if accessible parking is a percentage of the parking spots, then those numbers of accessible parking go down if we allow developers and redevelopment of existing infrastructure to somehow have less parking and then somehow have less accessible parking. Maybe those ratios have to be adjusted and changed along the way.

I want to just mention quickly that the March of Dimes' Steven Christianson sent a comment:

“As someone living with post-polio syndrome, I need to use a car for transportation because if I overwork my muscles, the nerve damage in my legs increases.” He runs a business, and his life revolves around worrying about parking and looking for parking. That's really disturbing, Madam Speaker. He talks about the area of Kingston, where he feels that accessible parking is being greatly diminished in his community. He is frustrated, and I certainly don't blame him and I don't think anybody here blames him.

I just want to mention that I've been offered a challenge, and I'm rising up to the challenge. It's called the Wheelchair Challenge and it's taking place this year on September 18. Maybe somebody here wants to join my team; six people can be on the team.

What they've done is so interesting. I think a lot of us remember when Mayor John Tory took the challenge and spent a day in a wheelchair. The feedback they got from getting a few people to do that—this is through Spinal Cord Injury Ontario—is that it was just too difficult to be in a wheelchair all day. You can certainly see why, because maybe our homes and our offices aren't set up for us just for that day.

So what they've done is that they've made it fun. They are having a carnival and they're having teams. You get the idea of what it's like to be in that wheelchair, but in a fun sort of atmosphere. It's a fun challenge, and I'm sure there's going to be lots of great food. They mentioned lots of great games as well.

I'm taking the challenge, and I'm asking everybody else to join me—also our federal colleagues, the MPs, if they also want to join the challenge and create some teams. This event can build momentum and maybe also bring those kids out to educate them. I think that, a lot of times, kids think it would be fun to be in that wheelchair. If a child has an opportunity to be in a wheelchair, I think you should give them that opportunity. I don't think that the person whose wheelchair it is feels disrespected; I think that they welcome us to take a turn in their wheelchair and see how difficult it is to manoeuvre.

I'm looking forward to everybody's comments, and I'm hoping that we can get this to committee to have that discussion on how to streamline and how to prevent fraud.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to be able to stand in this fine Legislature and add comment on Bill 187, An Act to establish a commission of inquiry into accessible parking in municipalities.

I very much appreciated listening to the presentation from the member from Thornhill. These are important conversations to be having, because in the coming up on two years I've been in this Legislature, we haven't had very many conversations about accessibility. Certainly we haven't had enough. I don't know that we could ever have enough, because until everyone can access all parts of our province and all parts of our systems, we still have conversations to have.

Specifically today, we're talking about the bill put forward and it is a bill that requires the Premier to recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that a commission be appointed to investigate accessible parking for persons with disabilities. Specifically, this commission would develop standard municipal bylaws and make recommendations concerning legislation to require municipalities to adopt and enforce such bylaws. The point is that the only people who should be parking in accessible spaces meant for Ontarians with disabilities are Ontarians who meet those criteria. That's the end of it.

We hear about people who are becoming almost like they're policing it. They think, “Oh, that person doesn't appear to be disabled. They're misusing the pass.” That's

not what this is about. This is not about the misuse of the system; it's about making sure that there are standards, because it isn't up to me and the public to identify what someone's challenge with accessibility is. Invisible disabilities are everywhere, and we're never going to see them, nor should we. That's the point. We want people to have full and fair access and be able to participate.

I've had a constituent who has called our office on and off through the last couple of years and lets us know every time that there is a challenge at our GO parking lots, and some of our other public spaces where it isn't being enforced: that there are individuals parking in accessible spaces and it would seem they shouldn't. We do need to crack down. We know that during periodic crackdowns, specifically the Toronto police have regularly seized over 1,000 permits each year for misuse. That's terrible.

I appreciate the goal of this bill, and I think that it is something that's very important to have the municipalities involved with a commission that would develop the standard bylaws so that we're all on the same page and making things more accessible.

While we're talking about accessibility and taking this opportunity: In my constituency office, we had the chance to make some renovations and to open up fresh to the community. We thought, "Well, good, it's accessible." Then we went, "Well, hold on. What is 'accessible,' actually? We think it's accessible." We made sure we had an accessible washroom in the different parts, and then we thought, "We better bring in someone else to weigh in before this is a done deal." I'm learning about accessibility, but I don't have to live it on a daily basis and be aware of the different accessibility standards that seem to exist out there, if I can call them standards.

We did have someone come in and point out the fact that our washroom needed to be large enough, not just for a wheelchair—because a wheelchair is not a standard piece of equipment for people who have mobility challenges. A four-wheeled scooter, a three-wheeled scooter: These are larger vehicles with more of a turning circle. We need to be able to get into a place and turn around and leave. These are things we need to think about.

We have a push panel outside the door that is actually pretty cool. Technology has come a long way. It isn't just a press panel; it's an entire strip that can be pressed by a service animal, by any type of mobility device or certainly by a person, and it allows more people to be able to come in. In fact, I would venture to say everyone, and that's the point. Especially when we're talking about anything to do with our Legislature, we want full access.

This is a chance to talk about our standards, to talk about what it could look like. I think we should also take a moment to talk about what it does look like or doesn't look like, and back to that point of standards.

1530

I had the opportunity to speak to the Durham region stroke recovery group about a year ago. While I was there talking to them about post-stroke physiotherapy and specific issues, a lot of what we talked about—it came

out that they couldn't access places in our community, whether it was because there were accessible parking spaces but they were blocked; or whether it was because there wasn't a curb, that something was marked accessible but there wasn't a lowered curb, or there was but there was a flowerpot in the way and you couldn't actually get into a restaurant or a building.

There were a number of stories of restaurants and entryways—doorways that have been specifically designed for Canadian winters to keep the cold air out; the two doors never open at the same time and winter stays on the outside and fine, warm dining stays on the inside. But the truth of the matter is, it also keeps out our community members. If someone is in a chair with a family member or partner behind them, they can't press both doors, they can't open the doors.

It's just recognizing that everywhere we look, we should be thinking about who can come in and how can they access—we need to see how to bring more people into our systems.

Thank you. I think that's it for time. In fact, I've gone over. There's so much to say, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm happy to be able to stand and speak to this private member's bill, because I think it raises some really important issues about access, about fair play, and about what we as citizens in our communities need to be doing to make sure that people who have mobility issues can have full access to the services that they need.

My mother is now of a certain age and has one of these permits, and nothing makes my blood boil more—now that I'm aware of some of the trials and tribulations she goes through—than when I'm out and about and I see someone who appears to be able-bodied parking in a spot that they really shouldn't be parking in.

As a town councillor in Aurora, we made it a special focus to make sure that our bylaw people were enforcing those regulations. I think things are much better, but I still hear about my mother and her friends and some of the challenges they have as they go about their daily lives. It's really important, obviously, too, that we make sure that especially seniors are able to maintain their mobility, and that includes making sure there is a robust permitting system.

I thank the member opposite for bringing forward her private member's bill on this important issue. This is an important one. I think members on both sides of the House can agree that the misuse and abuse of accessible parking permits and parking spaces is unacceptable and reprehensible.

I think, however, that it's important we fully understand the implications of the proposed commission of inquiry that her bill proposes. I know, and it's maybe my municipal councillor background—as municipal councillors, we don't always look favourably upon things being pushed down on us from on high. I am certainly sensitive to that. I know that our municipalities have their own

needs and challenges, and the Municipal Act allows them to establish the bylaws that reflect local concerns. Any reforms to the accessible parking permit program, I fear, will need to reflect this and allow the municipalities to manage and regulate their own bylaws.

Since 2006—just a bit of history we've looked up here—our government has made a number of improvements to the accessible parking permit program to increase security and reduce the misuse of permits. Most recently, in January 2016, we introduced enhanced permits that are more secure and tamper-resistant. We've implemented new identification requirements for applicants and third-party representatives to strengthen the integrity of the program. Individuals applying for, renewing or replacing a permit are now required to produce valid ID that proves their legal name, date of birth and signature. Third parties who submit an application are required to provide a letter of authorization signed by them and the applicant or a power-of-attorney document. So some significant enhancements have occurred already.

In addition to these changes, our government has reduced the validity period for interim permits from six months to three months, initiated new verification measures to identify and prevent fraud, revised and improved application forms, and developed and deployed a standardized approach for reporting accessible parking permit seizures, in partnership with municipal officials.

Ontario has the highest fines in Canada for the misuse of accessible parking permits, and to that I say, "Hear, hear." ServiceOntario will cancel or refuse to issue a replacement permit if one has been seized for misuse. We'll continue engaging the enforcement community and stakeholders to specifically address permit fraud and misuse in Ontario. As I said at the outset, everybody in this House will agree that the misuse of these permits is absolutely reprehensible. It's so important that we ensure that the credibility of the program remains intact. I think that a lot of what the government has done over the past year and a half speaks to making sure that that system is, in fact, very credible and very accessible.

Again, it has been said before: The challenge that we face is that this is a two-tier issue. We have the province, which issues the permits, but we have the municipalities, and each one of them is different, each with their own needs. It's up to them to decide where people can park through bylaw and how things are going to be enforced. It is a bit of a challenge. I know that in the work that I do and as a former municipal councillor, not only did I hear it, but I said it all the time, "One size does not fit all across Ontario." Any thinking that one Ontario law would take care of the issue across Ontario, I suspect, would not work because, as I said, each municipality has their own needs.

I think I'll leave it there, other than to say, again, I wanted to thank the member for bringing forward her bill. We all agree that the permits are very important, and the credibility of that program needs to be maintained. I'm not convinced that we need a full commission of

inquiry. I think what we need to do is just steady progress, as we've demonstrated, over the past couple of years, that we're enhancing the protection of those permits.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in support of my colleague from Thornhill's bill, Bill 187.

Look, I listened to the parliamentary assistant a few moments ago boasting that Ontario has the highest fines in Canada. I'll say, respectfully, that it's clearly not working. There's no doubt about it, a number of us have sensed that the number of violations have increased substantially. I picked that up.

I do talk radio from time to time; I have a show on Newstalk 1010, from 5 to 6 on Sundays, and CFRA Ottawa and panels. It pops up on the panels quite a bit. I know Mr. Baker is also on those panels, Mr. Singh is on those panels as well, and Ms. DiNovo. It has popped up a number of times. What I'm going to say to the member is that it's not a matter of simply fines; what you need is more Ryan Favros. You need more people like Ryan Favro.

You may remember this story, Speaker. The headline was "Video of Woman Pitching Coffee at Man over Disabled Parking Spot at Tim Hortons Goes Viral."

"A YouTube video of a woman angered by a man who confronted her for parking in a disabled parking spot outside a Tim Hortons in Toronto has sparked howls of online outrage."

This video was posted by a man named Ryan Favro; it had over 100,000 views, social-shaming this individual who parked in that spot.

1540

When she was confronted, by the way—I'll read you this: Ryan politely asks her about her Jeep parked in the Tim Hortons with no pass on it, no permit. She refuses to respond, so he says, "So why do you park in a handicapped parking spot? Are you handicapped?" "No," she says and walks away. "Well, what makes you so special that you can park in a handicapped spot?" he asks. "Pardon me, I will break your (expletive) phone," this woman says, as she gets into the driver's seat and slams the door. She then gets back out and hurls what appears to be iced coffee, along with profanities, at the videographer. The sad thing is, I think she only got a warning by the police after all of this was caught on video.

But social shaming—good for Ryan Favro. I actually think we need more of this. We no doubt will have some parking enforcement officers—those things are up—but a little bit of social shaming I think also goes a long way. It takes a particularly low form of humanity to steal a parking spot from someone with a disability, doesn't it? Because they're too important to walk the extra steps to get into a store? Come on. Fine them, shame them. I think that will go a long way.

In New Zealand, they also have a demerit point, which goes further; it impacts your insurance on your driver's licence for this type of loathsome activity.

Let me add on one more thing. There is an expression in life that I've become quite fond of: There's an app for that. God bless human ingenuity and rising to an important cause. Let me tell you a little bit about some of the apps that are out there and then I'll get to a final point. I know my colleagues want to speak as well.

Here we go. "New App Could Let Citizens Report Illegal Parking, Get Cut of Fine." What a novel idea. It's probably new for some of us to contemplate, but I kind of like it. So Mr. Potts, for example, may be a crusader to make sure people with disabilities have good parking. He finds somebody else has parked in that spot. He can snap a few photos, send them up through the app, which then goes to the municipality, the enforcement agency. The person gets fined, and you would have your choice of getting a cut of that fine or donating to your local charity, up to 20%. I think it's a fabulous idea. The app is called SpotSquad. I think it's spotsquad.ca, but just do a little search on your app downloading device and get SpotSquad.

How many people would be willing to snitch on their fellow citizens' poor parking?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I would.

Mr. Tim Hudak: There you go. I think a lot of us would. For other types of violations, jaywalking or something like that, no. But it's getting increasingly serious. I think more people would take this up.

The inventor of SpotSquad said that based on the amount of people who have already created SpotSquad accounts, there are going to be "lots of people who want to do this." I like the notion of donating your share of that fine back to a charity of your choice.

There's one in the States as well—I don't know if it's in Canada or Ontario yet—called Parking Mobility. This one has a nice feature too. This story is called "Finally: An App to Report Drivers Illegally Parked in Handicapped Spots." It says: for "folks like us" who want to "report d-bag drivers who use parking spots meant for the disabled," you can fine them—it's parliamentary, isn't it, Speaker, when I say "d-bag?" Twenty per cent goes to charity. Also, Parking Mobility allows posting of disabled spots anywhere in the city or the province or the state to make it easier for those looking for that type of parking to actually find it.

I think at the end of the day we will move from a world of paper-based permits and writing up tickets to one where you will actually have sensors in the spots that will connect with sensors in the vehicle so that you know only somebody with a disability can use that spot. We're moving in that direction, Speaker, when it comes to parking in general. Satellite technology—what do they call them?—blue hornets, green hornets; what colour are those hornets?

I think technology is going to solve these problems, but the only way we'll get there, with respect to my colleagues, is by passing the bill standing in the name of

the member for Thornhill, Bill 187. Let's look at these new options. It can make one heck of a difference and it's needed.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: First, it's always an honour to stand in this House, particularly today on Bill 187, An Act to establish a commission of inquiry into accessible parking in municipalities.

The member from—Mr. Hudak—was talking about the future; I'm going to talk a little about the past. I'm not disabled. My mom was born with spina bifida and she couldn't walk until she was seven or eight years old. She was born in World War II, when the people of Holland starved. A lot of people were born disabled at that time. They performed experimental surgery and my mom could walk after that. She's not an Olympic runner, but she can walk.

So when I was a kid, I spent a lot of time looking for places to park. And this isn't part of this debate, but I asked my mom once, "What was the toughest thing you ever faced?" And the toughest thing she ever faced was when they immigrated to Canada, they only allowed healthy people. My mom was inspected by a doctor and she had to stand for a certain length of time, and if she didn't stand long enough, her family couldn't come to Canada.

So, do we have a ways to go? Yes. But we've also come a long ways. I think we have to recognize that. But having said that, in our modern society there are a lot of things that we can do better, and if creating this commission of inquiry—and I know that sounds big, but knowing the member who proposed this fairly well, she's a practical person. She's not out to make the big commission of inquiry that takes years and spends millions. She's out to fix things for people, things that still happen.

When I'm with my mom and we're looking for a parking spot—she doesn't drive anymore; I drive—we don't always look for the handicapped spots, because frequently the handicapped parking spots are in the worst place to actually access the building. You'll have the handicapped parking spot on one side of the building and you'll have the part that doesn't have the curb on the other side of the building. It's crazy. It's like, the people who pick the spots don't look at how they actually can be used.

As far as people misusing, yes, people misuse these spots, and sometimes—we have very public lives. Most people in my riding know me, so sometimes I will park with my mom's sticker in the car to pick up my mom from a doctor or something, but I do it with fear because someone with an app could take a picture of me using a handicapped spot, but they'll be long gone by the time I'm holding my mom's arm, putting her in the car. That's the danger of some of those things. That's a true, true danger. I don't lie awake at night about it, but every time I do anything with my mom and we park somewhere where I can help my mom and I'm not within picture

distance of my mom, it's a problem. I'm all for apps that do this and apps that do that, but sometimes you have to be very careful, because you're actually going to hurt the people who are legitimately trying to help their loved ones, be they family, be they friends. That's something we all have to be cognizant of. I feel that a lot of times.

So we fully support this, anything that brings more people looking at this issue, more people understanding this issue. Hopefully, some other people who have watched this debate will gain some understanding of the issues these people face, the issues their families face. We've come so far, there's no reason why we can't go further, because many times a lot of the big steps have been taken, and now we have to make sure that the things we do make sense. I think that's what this bill is looking for. That's what the member, I believe, is looking for. I fully support it and I would like to fully thank her for bringing this issue forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

1550

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to rise this afternoon and spend a few minutes to add to the debate on Bill 187. I want, first of all, to applaud my colleague the member for Thornhill for landing on an issue that we all recognize but nobody has taken the time to understand the mechanics and the difficulties that people face.

I just have to comment on the couple of comments that have been made about the assumption that when an able-bodied person gets out, they're misusing the accessible parking space. You have no idea if or when the wheelchair comes out next or if the person needs physical help to get out of the car. In moving this issue forward, we have to maintain our understanding of the importance of not coming to a quick judgment.

But there are some things that I think need to be addressed. One of them is the question of the handicapped parking rules. Not only are they complicated, but they are increasingly inconsistent across the province. We heard an earlier comment made about the municipalities putting their own rules and regulations in place but, certainly from a consumer point of view, that just adds to the complication.

In my riding of York-Simcoe, not only are the rules different in York region and in Simcoe county, but even across the various municipalities. We not only have thousands of residents who struggle with mobility itself; they now have the extra burden of complex accessible parking rules that vary across municipal borders.

I looked at a possible hypothetical constituent, one who lives in Georgina, works in Newmarket and sometimes travels to Toronto. He or she would have to go through three separate sets of rules and then add more if they went to Markham or Barrie. Quite simply, those people need a universal framework within which to operate.

I can tell you that in Georgina, for instance, public places are required to provide designated accessible parking spaces. Then it drops down to the fine for this

parking infraction, which is \$300. But it is noted, at the same time, that certain types of parking violations are enforced on a proactive basis while others are only enforced on a complaint basis. So you've got difficulty with that.

Then if you go and look in Innisfil, they have authorized signs designating a space, but no person shall park or stop a vehicle or allow a vehicle to remain parked or stopped in a parking space reserved for persons with disabilities unless the valid disabled person parking permit is openly displayed, and so forth.

I think that's the first thing that needs to be addressed: how to come up with adequate language similarities. I remind people that people can't follow laws if they don't know what they are; and if they vary from one place to another, it's grounds for not knowing what the rules are. As was quoted earlier by my colleague from Thornhill, quite simply, the laws surrounding accessible parking, frankly, need to be accessible. At the same time, we need to crack down on accessible parking permit fraud.

So there's much for a group to do. I applaud the member for taking on this initiative. It's certainly an opportunity for people to look at. It's something that makes the lives of people much easier and better, if we look at this problem.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Mario Sergio: First of all, before I make some comments on the bill that is in front of us today, let me welcome and say hello, on behalf of the House here, to a constituent of mine, Louise Russo. I'm sure she does not need any introduction to this House. With Louise Russo, we also have a couple of members from the Ontarians with Disabilities Sub-Committee, which is from the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, Edward Rice, up in the, what do you call it, the Speaker's gallery up there—Speaker, that's your gallery—and a couple of other guests who are here to assist in the debate that is taking place today. I want to congratulate the member from Thornhill for bringing this to the attention of the House.

I have to say that I go back now to sometime in November last year when I started to deal with this particular issue as the minister, if you will. It was subsequent to a meeting which I had with Ms. Russo and others in the community, which was exactly pegged to these same issues. There are many reasons why I would like to say that something is being done about solving this particular problem. But if there is one, it's to get me out of trouble, if you will: Every time I see someone parking in a handicapped space and then running into the store, trying to say, "Oh, I'm going to buy cigarettes and then come out quickly," I stop there and I look at the person there, and then I get stared back at. I've gotten into an argument a couple of times. I want to avoid that situation where our nature takes over and says, "Ah, it's okay. There's nobody parking in here. I'm going to park in the handicapped parking spaces." I say, "Why are you doing that?" Then I get a very dirty look.

I'll stop right there. I don't want to go any further, but I believe this is something that needs to be looked at. I really don't know that we need a very particular inquiry to get to the stage that we want to go to, but we know the problem. I know the difficulty that may exist with doing it uniformly throughout the province. There are municipalities that may want to look at the situation in their own way, in a different way, and that would be okay as long as they look at it.

I speak mainly for the city of Toronto. There's a little town called Toronto here, and I have to say that the abuses continue to escalate because of a lack of, if you will, people that go around, check it out and issue tickets and what have you. We don't have the parking officers required. The whole city of Toronto has six, so you can imagine me calling from Finch and Islington, reporting it, and someone down at the Beach will have to come up and take a look at the parking space that I'm reporting at Finch and Islington. It's impossible.

I think, number one, we have to educate the public. The only way to do that is to involve some stricter rules and regulations and penalties as well. Otherwise, they won't get the message.

I can see that my time is going too fast even though I was not even allowed to say something, but I figure, if I can, I will. I'm getting the nod to say, "Cut it." But I'm going to take all the time, and if I have an extension I'm going to say even more about it, because it's something that we have to demonstrate to our people in need, people like Louise Russo and company there. We need to do something.

You know what? It's not only for them. It's for the family members as well, because the family members will see and say, "I want to congratulate Gila Martow for bringing this to the floor of the House. I want to congratulate the members of the House for supporting it and doing something about it, because it's an abuse." When there is an abuse, that abuse needs to be looked after. If we have to lower the hammer a little bit heavier to do away with those abusers, send a message, educate them—if it's through imposing major fines, then I would say, "So be it." Because do you know what? It's not only abuse. I think it's the way we issue those permits as well. I think it requires a good overlook, if you will, of the way we issue those permits. It's not fair.

In my case, when I see wonderful people that can get off their truck and run, or very nice, expensive cars, and walk very gingerly, and I'm saying, "Why are they displaying a permit?"—and I know what the member on the other side has said. The mother, of course—he has the right to take the mother—whatever. But—

Interjections.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Can I move an extension, Madam Speaker? Can I move an extension?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm so sorry. So sorry—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All right. Further debate.

1600

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Madam Speaker, I'm almost willing to offer my time back. He seemed so excited to discuss this bill, and I think we all are excited to bring out our thoughts and ideas.

It's interesting; I've been learning French for a while now, for the last few years here. It's tough to learn.

Interjections: Let's hear it.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: OK. J'ai pratiqué mon français. Oui?

Des voix: Oui.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: But when I hear Hudak speak in the Legislature—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You heard the member. The members of this House know they're supposed to address each other by their ridings. Okay? I remember saying it this morning. I remind the member: Address your colleague and everybody in this House—except the ministers, by their portfolios—by their ridings, please.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, excuse me. He's my colleague here; I call him by his name all the time.

But anyway, when he talks about apps and such, it's something that we have to get used to. The member of the third party is saying that he is fearful of what these apps can cause, but what he was saying could happen could happen today already. All you need is a camera and to scan it onto your Facebook.

We can't be fearful of progress and new technology. We can actually utilize this information to make parking more accessible to those who are disabled, and that's one way to crack down.

I'll just say quickly that what I've seen John Tory do to the parking abuses on University Avenue since he started is just amazing. I drive through here Monday mornings and they're just clearing the cars out. It's called enforcement, and maybe that's what we need to pick up in the municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Thornhill to do the wrap-up.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank everybody who spoke today on the bill. I'm not going to list all the different ridings, because that will use up my two minutes.

But I do want to mention a couple of the comments. The member from Oshawa: I want to thank her for pointing out scooters, because it's not wheelchairs anymore now. We are seeing a lot of people with scooters, which require ramps that might be slightly different. I'm hearing from many stakeholders that there are posts blocking the ramps to get onto the sidewalk, or blocking where a ramp could be lowered or the back tailgate of a van could be opened.

I want to just alleviate the fears of the member from Newmarket—Aurora. My intention isn't to force any municipalities; it's to sit down with the municipalities and with all the stakeholders and advocates that are here to explain, because in the words of David Lepofsky, who is such an advocate for accessibility, it shouldn't be left

to people with disabilities to have to lobby “every single municipality.”

Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, people who have mobility challenges and who want to speak to each municipality have to go lobby and actually visit them? I want to bring those municipalities here to Queen’s Park or to meetings around the province, and have the accessibility groups come and meet with the municipalities to hear from the municipalities why they have to have a different rule than every other municipality in their area.

Let’s start with Toronto and all of the municipalities that touch Toronto, and work our way out, because it’s the GTHA. York region itself has so many municipalities, and if we can’t even get the GTHA to work like a community and do what’s good for the people in the community who need our support, then we’re doing something very wrong here and it’s extremely disappointing.

I want to mention quickly that I visited Sunrise Medical and Reg McClellan from 49 Bespoke, and they gave me a fantastic tour. I invite everybody to come up to my riding to see the wheelchairs and scooters and how they are made and maintained, because that’s the big challenge: maintaining them.

Thank you, everybody, for your comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members’ public business has expired.

CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot number 36, standing in the name of Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker has moved private member’s notice of motion number 72. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion is now carried.

Motion agreed to.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (NUMBER PLATES AND CARRYING RACKS), 2016 LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (PLAQUES D’IMMATICULATION ET SUPPORTS DE TRANSPORT)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved second reading of Bill 191, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to number plates and carrying racks.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It is now carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to the standing orders, the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka?

Mr. Norm Miller: Justice policy committee, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I hear that the member would like to refer the bill to the justice policy committee. Agreed? Agreed.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ACCESSIBLE PARKING IN MUNICIPALITIES ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 CONCERNANT LA COMMISSION D’ENQUÊTE SUR LE STATIONNEMENT ACCESSIBLE DANS LES MUNICIPALITÉS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Martow has moved second reading of Bill 187, An Act to establish a commission of inquiry into accessibility parking in municipalities.

Is the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to the standing orders, the bill is now referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Justice policy committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The bill is to go to justice policy committee. Agreed? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ONTARIANS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L’ONTARIO (SÉCURISER LA RETRAITE EN ONTARIO)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 3, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 186, Loi établissant le Régime de retraite de la province de l’Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to the order of the House dated May 5, 2016, I’m now required to put the question:

Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

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

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The vote has been deferred: “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on second reading of

the Bill 186 be deferred until deferred votes on Monday, May 9, 2016.”

Second reading vote deferred.

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES SERVICES
FINANCIERS DE RECHANGE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 3, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I think that there has been previous discussion about this piece of legislation. There is a concern in our discussions that some of the legislation is incomplete, and we look forward to further amendments that can be made.

It does include limits and guideline regulations that ensure certain fees and penalties are applied to stop obsessive overuse that traps those individuals finding themselves caught in the continual cycle known as the “debt trap.”

This reminds me of the kind of no-win situation that was the case for people back in the 18th century. There were frequently debts created by gambling, but the person would be unable to pay their debt, and so then they would find themselves in debtors' prison. In the situation of being unable to be in any gainful employment, obviously you would never get out of debtors' prison. That's the version a couple of hundred years ago, where people were locked away with no hope of being able to pay off their debts.

1610

The debt trap that we are talking about in this bill is obviously the limitation on what has prompted people to seek the payday loan. What happens there, then, is that if it is a stopgap and a way to be able to keep the roof over the head for the month, then it works, it happens, but it obviously creates that trap. There are many reasons for that, some of which I will make reference to in the few moments that I have.

There are certainly a growing number of Ontarians who find themselves unable to meet their bills and meet those payments that are required, so they take that step into borrowing through the payday loan system. The danger is, of course, that what drove them to need it in the beginning now becomes a cyclic thing. Now the next time they need to meet payment schedules, they find themselves in that situation.

Certainly, as an MPP, I see the effects of higher and higher costs—like the hydro costs, just to name one, but

also increases in the cost of living and food and rent and gas and things like that. These things combine and obviously make it more difficult for people to pay the fuel bills, the gas, the hydro, food and things like that.

There's now a problem that people are having to make tough decisions. Sometimes these decisions include making a choice as to which bills get paid on time and how to make ends meet. Not all of us are fortunate enough to have the luxury of walking into a bank or calling up a family member for a short-term loan. Some individuals are forced to face these rising costs and bills alone. Certainly we hear from those people in our ridings. That's one avenue of the problem.

Another area that the bill alludes to is of course the need for a much better financial literacy level amongst the population as a whole, so that people would see the payday loan system as something that wasn't designed for that purpose; it was designed for the need to be able to cash a cheque when sometimes banks take 10 or 12 days to process a cheque. The limits of financial literacy that too many of our citizens suffer from mean that they see this as a quick opportunity to do some financial management.

I know in my riding I've had businesses tell me that they are trying to make contractual arrangements with people who have declared bankruptcy and who have no idea of the impact that that “bankrupt” cloud has over them for a few years, so that they can't just walk into a car dealer and choose the car they want and assume there will be credit available for them.

The financial world has become much more complicated than it was years ago. Even the banks I've mentioned have time frames that they have to follow, and I think that it's important to understand that while we're talking about the payday loans and things like that, we put the banks in the context of their historical role.

Throughout history, we see the evolution of banking and its services, and the different products it offers now. Since the mid-1970s, we've seen the growth of a middle class, to now allow families enough money to begin thinking about personal finance, rather than making it to payday. I think that's a very important goal.

Banks were originally used as a safe haven to protect you through your travels. Now we've seen the advent of convenience banking, from online accounts to debit and credit cards. These systems have evolved to often become taken for granted, as it isn't obvious to the consumer the extensive cost and security devoted to these systems. It is for these reasons we see the requirements of minimum balances and high fees.

I think that I've got to circle back to this lack of understanding—the importance of people recognizing things like interest rates and how a store can advertise a level of interest rate, and how an interest rate can be misinterpreted: Is it annual or is it more frequently, than that? There are so many demands that people need to make. At the same time, advertising makes it look like it's painless and easy. It's the never-never plan. There seems to be a wide gulf in the way that people understand

this. I know, for instance, of families that operate on the basis—their financial operation is, “Which bill will we pay this month?” So there’s a permanent state of indebtedness and a permanent state of not being able to get out of that.

Payday loans are typically short-term loans of less than \$500 that are repaid in a lump sum and made in exchange for a postdated cheque or pre-authorized debit. It’s difficult to have exact figures on this, but it is estimated that approximately 3% of Ontarians took out a payday loan in the last 12 months. They’re generally catered to individuals who are unable to access traditional sources of credit.

Now, the government, aside from this piece of legislation, has set up a group of people to examine this process. This is not public at this time. It obviously limits the opportunity for a more fulsome discussion—if we had that information from the government at this time.

Obviously, there is a great deal of learning to be done, of understanding by the general public—and not be drawn into the easy advertising that suggests you can make a deal anytime, anywhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I respectfully recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It’s a pleasure to stand in the House today and respond to the member from York–Simcoe and her remarks regarding Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

I listened intently to her remarks, and they focused on financial literacy in large part, and it is something that’s missing in our current society. A lot of our younger people don’t understand it. To compound that, what she also talked about is how society in general is pushing people to borrow.

She mentioned advertising. When they advertise—they went to bi-weekly car payments to make them look smaller, and then weekly car payments, and there are certain cars you can buy for a coffee and a doughnut per day. It’s no secret what these people are trying to do: They’re trying to make things look attainable when maybe they really shouldn’t be. I don’t think it’s the real issue behind the payday loan problem, but it’s the same issue as, “Buy furniture now and pay 18 months later.” Well, for a lot of people, the couch is half worn out; you don’t feel like paying for it 18 months later. But you can have it now. We’re in a “you can have it now” society. I think that’s what the member was focusing on. It is a big issue where we have to make sure our younger generations know that at the end of the day, you have to pay your bills. If you don’t pay your bills, then bad things happen, and a lot of people don’t appreciate that. Close people in my family had to learn the hard way. Another member said that your credit card limit isn’t something you have to spend. On that I would like to end my remarks.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I think it’s really important to spend a couple of minutes on this and respond to the member from York–Simcoe. She raised some important issues that are perhaps outside the scope of the bill, but I agree with her, and I agree with the member of the third party. When we talk about consumer literacy or financial literacy, absolutely—it’s perhaps more than financial literacy; really, it’s consumer literacy. We seem to have moved into a world that is very consumerist-oriented and in need of immediate satisfaction of whatever we want. But for a significant number of people, it’s not a “buy now.” They definitely need the services that these institutions offer them. I’m so glad to see that Bill 156 will address a number of key ones.

Let me, if I may, Mr. Speaker, just touch on a few of the important things that the bill will address, from a consumer’s perspective. Those consumers who have a debt in collections will benefit from the new debt collection rules that apply more broadly, including applying them to debt purchases. Consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. I’ve heard this quite frequently across Ontario, that sometimes those people, those vulnerable people, who receive a government cheque are unable to open up a bank account and cash it. They rely on these institutions which charge them too much. That should come to an end. Consumers using rent-to-own services should be better treated; instalment loans, payday loans and those who borrow repeatedly should enjoy better coverage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I spoke about this at length the other day, and I think what I want to reiterate is the reality that we need these services for some people. Some people can’t find the normal practice of credit. They aren’t able to engage those services. So there is a valid need for this, sadly. What I was able to share—I’ve got feedback in my riding that there is more and more people needing these types of services, and a lot of that is because the cost of living for a lot of people is getting that much more expensive. People between paycheques are having a hard time. It’s being able to access—again, people new to our province sometimes haven’t got that established line of credit built yet or approved, so they need it. At the end of the day, we just have to always make sure that we think about the services that people truly need and do our best to provide those.

My colleague did a great job of outlining this, and our critic, Jim McDonell from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, spent an hour putting the outline together, putting a lot of valid points on the table. My colleague from York–Simcoe did a great job as well of bringing some valid points, and a number of my other colleagues are going to bring more of those.

I think what I really want to leave the audience that’s listening and watching at home with is the reality, again, that these types of services, sadly, are becoming more

needed. We're hearing that there's an increase in food banks. A lot of people are having to make choices in how they actually pay their bills. There's not an abundance for a lot of people in the bank at the end of the day, and they need to have short-term access to be able to do these types of things. We all, sadly, run into occasions where we are struggling, where we don't have the ability to have all the cash in the bank, so we have to make arrangements to be able to have short-term access to be able to pay our bills. To pay our food bill versus our hydro bill is one of the things we certainly hear in this Legislature on an almost daily basis; the people who are struggling, particularly those in need, trying to understand how they pay their bills. I think this is a valid service, and we have to be very cautious, going forward, to make sure that these types of services are accessible for those in need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I recognize the member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The member from York–Simcoe did an excellent job, of course, in outlining this bill, but here's the point: How many people in this House would walk into a bank or actually apply for a credit card, and the representative told them they were going to be paying somewhere in the order of 550% interest—how many in this House would actually stay for more than a nanosecond before running to the door, I would think with your hair on fire at that point? And 550% interest is what payday lenders are actually charging. To make one thing perfectly clear, \$21 per \$100 is not 21% interest. That is over a two-week period. If you annualize that, it's in the mid-500s. That is the interest rate they're charging.

There used to be a usury law in Canada that capped interest rates at 60%. Again, I think that if anybody offered you 60%, you should run screaming from that bank or that credit card company. But people don't get it; they don't see what's happening. These are the very institutions that prey upon those who are desperate because, quite frankly, the only people who would borrow any amount of money at 550% interest are the same people who used to go to Vinnie down at the bar, who broke your legs if you didn't pay him back. I know that some of my distant relatives in the past had that experience.

Here we have a legalized form of the same thing. Instead of Vinnie down at the bar who would break your legs if you didn't pay him back, you have somebody across the street from your house—by the way, probably across the street from your house if you're in the one of the poorer neighbourhoods—and they'll charge you 550% interest.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I return to the honourable member from York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to thank all the members who participated: the members for Timiskaming–Cochrane, Newmarket–Aurora, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Parkdale–High Park.

I think we all share the same concerns in terms of the importance of this legislation to be seen from the consumer perspective. Again, the need to provide better

consumer literacy, which the member for Newmarket–Aurora mentioned, is very important. It has to be done as a bit of an antidote to the manner in which savings and purchasing and money are presented in a way to attract you to spend more without thinking about the limitations of interest and the cost of doing this. I think that is perhaps where the consumer protection element comes into this as well.

Look at that advertising. Is it responsible in the manner in which it presents itself? And \$21 for \$100 is pretty questionable on that scale.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Before I begin, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should explain to anybody watching why I'm wearing a chupa. I'm wearing this chupa—that's what it's called—because today was Tibet day. We had a wonderful luncheon here, for those who partook of it, and celebrated Tibetan culture and their struggle for freedom in their homeland as well. I just wanted to put that out there.

Now, to get to the government bill, which really is a set of promises for further consultation, let's look at a little bit of the history of payday lending in this province. As I was saying in my comments about the member from York–Simcoe's comments, this started as a federal criminal law: Any interest charged over 60% was considered usurious; that was the law. The Harper government, in their wisdom, downloaded the responsibility for taking care of usurious interest rates to the province. After I was first elected back in 2006, it was the Wild West for a while here in Ontario, and people were charging anything and everything. Payday lenders sprang up like mushrooms in the poorest districts across our city, preying on the poorest people, and interest rates were hovering around 800% to 1,000%. It was at that time that I tabled a bill modeled on the Quebec bill—which is law in Quebec—to cap interest rates at 35%.

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Now, even at 35%—I think many in this House have mortgages. Knowing that the mortgage interest rates are hovering between 2% and 4% for most people—I mean, think about it. There's a big gap between 35% and even the highest interest rates charged by credit card companies, which are in themselves, arguably, out of line, in the high 20% to 30% range. But 35% is the law in Quebec. At 35%, with that law in Quebec, there are no payday lenders. They don't have the blight we have here in Ontario. They have no payday lenders.

Now, it gets complicated because since I tabled that bill with the huge support of the Toronto Star, which ran an editorial supporting my bill, and ACORN, a phenomenal group—by the way, anybody from ACORN listening, kudos to you for taking this on. They have made this one of their seminal issues. Since tabling that bill, guess what's happened? The world of commerce being what it is, even in Quebec, the whole move to payday lending has moved online. So now, even though they have capped interest rates at 35% in the province of Quebec,

that doesn't stop somebody from going online, getting rollover and back-to-back loans at, again, 550% or more in real dollars and cents.

Part of the problem with payday lenders is that they know their audience. They pretend that their audience is just people like we are: middle-class people in Ontario. That's not who is taking out payday loans, I'm afraid to say, as somebody who stood in a demonstration outside with them back when my bill was live. The people who are walking in and out of payday lenders are those who earn the least, those who are the most marginalized, those who are the most vulnerable, those who are too desperate because they have to feed their children or they have to pay their rent. It doesn't matter what the small print says. It doesn't matter that we now—since my bill and since the pressure on the government in 2009, they limited to \$21. Again, limited to only 550% interest, not 800% to 1,000%, and they also put in the real interest rates and information. But people who are desperate don't read that information.

Concurrently with the payday lending movement, what also was happening was the recognition that people who cannot get credit—who have a bad credit history or who can't get a loan or an overdraft at their bank anymore—may need to borrow. But they don't need to be put further in debt by payday lenders; they may need something called a microloan. Microloans are what people who live on low incomes occasionally need. ACORN and other anti-poverty groups recognize that.

Actually, to their credit, some banks stepped up. I remember doing a whole long investigation with one of our banks that set up an outlet where they didn't ask for the normal ID and where they did extend what could really be called microloans. Guess what happened? That outlet closed and guess what it is now? A pawn shop on Queen Street in my riding, next door to a payday lender. The banks not only didn't follow through on that, but guess what? The banks also are now invested in payday lending because they know where profit is and where profit is to be made. How could you not make a profit at 550% interest?

So what do we need? What we need is not in this bill. This is a consultation document. What we need is political will around this issue. What we need is a government with a backbone, that's really, really willing to do something for those who are marginalized. I can tell you, there isn't a financial planner in the world—not in the world—who will advise their client to go to a payday lender or not advise their client to get out of payday loans as quickly as they can. That is sound financial advice. There is no other sound financial advice when it comes to payday lenders, any more than there would be sound financial advice about Vinnie down at the bar who would break your knees if you went to him, and he's a loan shark. No financial adviser is going to advise you to go to a payday lender. Clearly they're a blight on our neighbourhoods. There are moves at city council to make sure there are not too many of them all clustered around the poorest of the poor. In fact, they've set up in my neigh-

bourhood, right across from drop-in centres, where people on social assistance go to get meals. They know their target, and it's merciless; absolutely merciless.

So what do we need? First of all, what we need is to say, like Quebec did, that anything over 35% is usurious. Please—come on. That, we could do; that's what we should do. It's not enough anymore. Now we need to look at online lending. I have to tell you, there are jurisdictions around the world that are way, way ahead of us on this, Madam Speaker. There are jurisdictions, like in Florida and in fact in most of the states now, where you have real data—which the payday lending institutions are fighting against—real data tracked online, so if you go online and you try to do rollover loans, you try to borrow from here and then borrow from there and, of course, dig yourself deeper and deeper into debt in a way that you will never, ever get out—if you are to do that, we can track you and we can legislate around it. That software exists; that ability exists. Many of the states are doing it. We should be doing it here too.

A two-pronged event: Stop usurious interest charges. Please, don't tell me they can't make money at 35% interest. Really? So stop that. Number two: Look at the online aspect of payday lending and at least be able to regulate that, as many south of the border do.

This is what needs to be done. It's not rocket science. It has been asked for for almost a decade by those who are in anti-poverty groups, such as great organizations like ACORN. But there's no political will here to do it. We could talk about who gives money to which party, Madam Speaker, in terms of why there isn't the political will to really get at this issue, but I won't go there. I don't even need to go there. I just need to talk about ethics, morals. In what world is it ethically or morally right for someone who is one of the most marginalized persons—because, you remember, they're the only people who go in there. Nobody who could borrow money on their credit card or borrow money on a credit line or do an overdraft—none of those people would go to a payday lender if they knew one iota about them. What they prey upon is those who are so desperate they have nowhere else to turn. Those are who they're preying on. They're charging them 550% interest. Tell me in what world that's ethical, in what world that's not usurious, in what world that shouldn't be criminal. It was criminal in this country.

This government doesn't think it's criminal. This government thinks it's okay: "We'll just tweak around the edges a little bit. Five hundred and fifty per cent interest? Go for it, and build more payday lenders everywhere in our neighbourhoods."

I can tell you, that's not what the people of Parkdale—High Park think. That's not what the people I speak to in Ontario think. That's not what any of the anti-poverty groups thinks. If this government was serious about anti-poverty, they would be looking at this issue too. So what do we do? Criminalize them, Madam Speaker: That's what we should do.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I am going to comment briefly on the comments made by the member from Parkdale–High Park. I think she was very passionate when she spoke about this bill today. The good thing about second reading, which we're doing right now, is that after this debate goes on, hopefully it moves to a committee where there's going to be proper consultation, proper time spent to allow groups like ACORN to come in and make presentations to the committee and recommend proposed changes to this bill. I hope they do. I've been on many committees through the years and I find that oftentimes amendments are made to bills, if that's required.

The bill in front of us today is, again, to protect consumers regarding their financial rights when they go to get payday loans and other financial services. Our government had already consulted and brought forward this bill. It has various sections in it that deal with these high-debt companies that go out and say, "We'll give you a payday loan." Instantly, my sense is that something is wrong, but in various parts of Toronto—and I have some high-needs communities in my riding—people are living basically from paycheque to paycheque. They need to survive.

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I keep saying this point again and again. In my riding, I've learned that people will pay for their accommodations first, and the second most important thing, if they need food, they'll go to the food bank. But they want to live in their home. If they're living on a minimum wage and they need some money, they can be lured into some of these places.

Our government has tried to provide more information to people and more protection to them. Now, whether or not we go as far as to what Quebec had to do, that's something that could be discussed at committee.

She had some very important points to make. I'm glad that she made them and I look forward to this debate continuing and going to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to be able to put in my two cents in response to my colleague from Parkdale–High Park and to comment on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

I would also like to thank her and applaud her for the work that she's done on this issue through the years. When I had prepared for the 20-minute speech that I gave a week or so ago, I looked back through Hansard and I learned a lot about how far we have needed to come on this issue, and now I realize how much further we still have yet to go.

When we talk about our communities and those who are struggling within them, people across our communities struggle, those who live in neighbourhoods you wouldn't often expect to be struggling financially. We've talked about that, driving through a neighbourhood with homes where you think that those who are living in them

probably have an easier time of it, perhaps, than in other neighbourhoods. But we realize that people are struggling so much under the weight of daily life and the cost of living that many are house-poor, many are turning to our food banks and many are turning to alternative financial services, which I think is a really pretty euphemism for loan sharks. But they're turning to payday loans, as well.

Historically, we've seen these lending agencies and loan sharks pop up in areas where they are targeting those who are disadvantaged, those who are struggling more obviously. But we're seeing that this is a business, this is an industry that is just sneaking its way into all of the different parts of our community and preying on struggle everywhere that they can. I think that it is really important for us to recognize that this is not an industry we want to grow. We don't want our food banks to continue having more people coming in. We need to stop struggle expanding and we need to strengthen our communities. We have an opportunity here.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to be recognized in this House.

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to speak to the comments from the member from Parkdale–High Park. Her continued advocacy for those less fortunate than the rest of us is admirable, as it always is. And her passion for this issue continues on this, as she has on so many other issues.

This debate reminds me somewhat of the Popeye cartoon, Speaker; Popeye the Sailor Man, as you know. He had a sidekick named Wimpy, and Wimpy would often say, "I would gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." What if poor Wimpy had gone Tuesday to pay back for that hamburger and his costs had escalated dramatically? Because that's at the essence of what we're talking about here: People seeking food, seeking to make ends meet on limited resources are finding themselves having to go out to get that hamburger, only to find, when they come back on Tuesday to pay for it, that it's become unaffordable. So that's kind of the philosophy.

We are taking a look at this legislation in a way that we can regulate the kinds of financial services where people are targeting vulnerable people. It's not unlike door-to-door salespeople who are going out and finding vulnerable people to sell furnaces and HVACs to.

I think that our government is taking an extraordinarily responsible approach. Whether criminalization is the only answer—I'm not sure that our jails aren't full of criminals enough that this should be criminal, but certainly we should be regulating in a way.

I remember listening to the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, who talked about, "There's an app for everything." Here's a circumstance where there are extraordinarily exorbitant prices being charged for financial services. I'll bet that there's an app, that we could develop an app that would allow people to get around

these payday loan people who are charging exorbitant fees, in order to give them a little—

Interjection.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Oh, there's a whole bunch I want to talk about. My mother-in-law does this great work, and Mike the café guy, but for that point I'll save that for another time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm glad to add some comments to my colleague earlier on.

As part of my colleague from Beaches–East York's comments, there is an app for that. You thought of a great idea; the problem is, once you think of it, somebody already invented it. You've got to move fast. It's called Borrowell. In fact, our consumer technology caucus, which I co-chair with the member for Waterloo and the member for Cambridge, had Borrowell come in to talk to us about some of the new opportunities from technology. Borrowell is basically an online lending service that gives you a low-interest loan online. You do allow them to check your credit, obviously, but because they don't operate infrastructure and buildings, their costs are lower, and they have an algorithm to calculate the loan.

I actually applied for one to see what it was like, and within minutes of me saying, "Yes, you can look at my credit history," I was offered a loan at a low rate. I was a little worried they wouldn't give it to me, but they did. I didn't fulfill the deal; I was testing it out. But that's filling in the gap. I know that some credit unions, as well, are looking at the easy microloans at a lower interest rate. I'll talk about this in more detail later in debate, hopefully.

I know the assumption of many is that anybody who goes to get credit from a payday loan institution needs to be protected by government, or they're stupid and they're not making the right decision, but I'll argue the opposite: The vast majority are making rational decisions. The problem is, if you walk into your bank and say, "I need a \$200 loan for a week," they won't even talk to you, most of them, or they'll make you fill out all kinds of paperwork and come in next week. So they've filled a bit of a niche.

I agree, we need to have strong consumer protection standards and we have to have transparency in decision-making, but let's not automatically assume that we should close all these places down. Yes, there will be new technology solutions with this. I think the credit unions, like First Credit, are getting into this neighbourhood as well. But let's be very careful not to shut down what is a legitimate choice by a lot of rational, thinking individuals.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return back to the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to everybody for weighing in on this.

And the member from Niagara—

Interjection: —West–Glanbrook.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —West–Glanbrook, thank you— is quite right to say that credit unions are getting

involved, and they should, and we should have the ability to make microloans to people. There's no quarrel there.

Absolutely, I never said people are stupid; I said they're desperate when they go to payday lenders. They're not stupid. They know that they have to fill out lots of paperwork. They know their credit has been cut off. That's why they're driven to these places.

But I come back to the reality: Quebec still stands, Quebec still exists, and yet they have capped interest rates at 35%. It's doable. People do it. Other jurisdictions have done it. Guess what? Banks are still making money, lending institutions are still making money and credit card companies are still making money. They just don't have the blight of payday lenders in their poorer neighbourhoods.

They do have online borrowing, however, and that is a whole other area. Absolutely, there's an app for that. Absolutely, this is where this whole industry is moving. It can be tracked. The very fact is that the software exists to track rollover loans and who's applying, making sure people who are on social assistance are not among them etc. That software exists and is being used in American jurisdictions as we speak. That is a much more humane road to go, even if the interest is a little higher than I would like to see.

But 550% interest should not be allowed, and it wasn't allowed. It wasn't allowed under Conservative governments federally and it wasn't allowed under Liberal governments federally; it was criminalized. It was criminal. It's only now that it's not. Sitting at the dining room table with Diefenbaker fans and Tommy Douglas fans, as I grew up with, both would have agreed that 550% interest is morally wrong.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to second reading of Bill 156. Knowing I was going to be speaking this afternoon, I was hoping that the House would be crowded. I'm concerned because I don't think there's a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): A quorum is present.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All right. I recognize the member again.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you again, Madam Speaker, for bringing the members in to hear the debate this afternoon. I think this is an important debate on Bill 156, an Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services.

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It was introduced in the Legislature before Christmas. On December 9, it received first reading, and it stands in the name of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. Of course, the government has led off the

debate with a number of lengthy speeches explaining the rationale and the purpose for this bill. We're told this bill is all about proposing changes to payday loans and debt collection—introducing legislation to strengthen consumer financial protection. That's what the government is telling us the bill is all about.

It's intended, according to the government, to increase protections for consumers who find it necessary to use what they call high-cost alternative financial services, which we commonly speak of as payday loans, instalment loans, rent-to-own services and cheque-cashing services, and to better protect Ontarians with respect to these debts that might be necessary to collect back.

If passed, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, the government tells us, would make amendments to the Payday Loans Act, the Consumer Protection Act and the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act, increasing protection for consumers in several new ways, the government claims. They're suggesting that consumers cashing cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information made available to them and would benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. The government is saying that people would have more information about the transactions that they're entering into voluntarily and that there would be a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services so it wouldn't exceed a maximum amount.

The government says that consumers using rent-to-own services would benefit from a grace period for repayment, so people who enter into these contracts, I assume, would have a grace period before they have to resume paying back their obligation. Consumers using instalment loans would be certain that the cost of optimal insurance would not be excessive. Again, I think that commitment or statement by the government is subject to questions. How do we define "excessive"? That's certainly a subjective expression, I'm sure. To some people, "excessive" might mean something very different than other people might conclude.

Consumers who are repeat payday loan borrowers would have the option of a longer repayment period under this Bill 156, the government tells us. Consumers with overdue debts would apparently benefit from expanded rules against unfair collection practices from businesses that purchase and collect overdue debts.

Now, all of us would hope and expect that the government would introduce legislation to ensure that consumers have adequate protection with respect to payday loans and other alternative financial services, and it remains to be seen if indeed this bill is fully in the public interest. We expect and anticipate that as this debate concludes, the bill may very well, because the government has a majority, pass into law. We would anticipate and expect that it would be referred to a standing committee, hopefully for an opportunity for public hearing so that people who have an interest in this issue, as well as the organizations that are involved, would be able to come to a standing committee and express their views, ideas and concerns, perhaps, leading to amendments that

hopefully would strengthen the bill and improve it, and ensure that it is in the public interest.

Now, the government tells us that they've already consulted approximately, I believe, a thousand people, I saw in one of the documents here. I would say admittedly, if indeed that's true, that's fairly extensive consultation. But I think, still, when the bill—any piece of legislation—is introduced, often there's greater awareness that the government is moving forward with a serious proposal and, in many cases, it leads to additional interest from the general public. When we advertise about a bill for a standing committee, it usually leads to considerable interest from groups and individuals and, of course as we know, they participate in public hearings, if indeed those are offered by the government.

Again, this bill was introduced, and apparently the government says they're continuing to seek more public input on this issue, broadly speaking. There is a news release that was sent out just last month, April 20, where the government claims to be seeking more public input on how much borrowers should pay for a payday loan in the province. I would suggest that the government continue to consult on this important issue, to ensure that the end result is positive and in the best interests of the people of the province.

Our party's critic, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, gave a one-hour leadoff speech on behalf of our caucus. He made some very important points. I had the opportunity to be here because I was in the chair that afternoon. It was a good speech, and I think it highlighted a number of the concerns that he has heard in his consultations as our party's credit critic and also from people across the province.

I know our caucus has a number of suggestions and concerns with respect to this bill. We believe that payday lending should be a last resort for consumers who have bad credit or no credit and who experience an unexpected expense or an unexpected drop in income. Not everyone would partake of the availability of payday loans. People who have a bank account, who perhaps have a line of credit account with a credit union or a bank, in most cases, I would suggest, probably are not customers or clients of companies that do payday loans—in all likelihood. But there is a segment of our population that do use these alternative financial services and, from time to time, do need them.

We believe this approach should not be meant as a regular source of funding. We want to ensure, though, that Ontarians who need these services continue to have access to them, including the cashing of cheques. We believe that not every recipient of a government cheque necessarily has a bank account and would need to have a means of being able to cash that government cheque if they don't have a bank account, so these payday loans organizations provide that means.

The payday lending industry, I'm told, strives to work with the government in order to create a set of consistent and fair rules that protect consumers and allow the industry to survive. I would hope that the industry is prepared to work with government, to work together to

establish a regulatory climate that is fair to all and ensures that the public interest is served.

Our party says that this bill, though, expands the reach of the government from rule-setting to micromanaging the industry in some respects. Certainly we would want to call attention to that issue. I'm sure there's going to be further discussion of that issue at the standing committee and, hopefully, there may be some opportunity for amendments to respond to that concern.

People who have only recently arrived in Canada or who have experienced negative credit events, such as bankruptcy, missed payments or a consumer proposal, might find it difficult to access extra funds, if needed. We would say that this government should be dedicating more energy to appropriate credit and financial literacy amongst the general consumer population rather than micromanaging the sector, hoping that that will solve the problem. I would agree with that, Madam Speaker. I think there is a great need for opportunities for some Ontarians to enhance their financial literacy and have a greater understanding of the implications of some of their financial decisions.

But at the same time, we see a provincial government that has allowed the provincial debt to more than double during its tenure in office, going back to 2003. I believe the provincial debt now stands at \$308 billion. The interest cost on that debt on an annual basis is now the third-highest provincial government expenditure, only behind health and education. We are the largest sub-national debtor in the world. If we see a provincial government that is spending beyond its means, borrowing the difference, year after year after year, doubling the provincial debt, it's not surprising that there are some Ontario residents who are struggling day to day to live within their means, month to month and, in some cases, in need of these payday loans.

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Earlier this year, I worked with my riding office staff to develop a petition on hydro rates. I want to put that on the record just at the end of my remarks, of course. Because, as of May 1, we experienced yet another hydro rate increase. We have to be concerned about that because it's costing hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs, or at least contributing to the loss of those jobs. At the same time, many consumers are struggling to pay their hydro bills. There are a lot of concerns about the cost of living, and this is one of them. I would encourage the government to consider that concern as well in the context of the debate on Bill 156.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in the House today and follow the member from Wellington-Halton Hills and his remarks on, basically, the payday loan act.

I would like to commend the member. I don't always agree with his arguments, but they're always reasoned and well laid out. He is, in my opinion, one of the pillars of political debate here.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, because he's always reasoned. He brought up the point—and I'm going to comment on what he said—of the provincial debt. That is a big problem because if they keep going this way, they're going to need a payday loan—

Hon. Michael Coteau: You guys doubled the debt. You both doubled the debt.

Mr. John Vanthof: No. If you look at the overall economy, you keep going—

Hon. Michael Coteau: You both doubled the debt.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I want to remind the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport that there is no crossover talking.

Can we stop the clock?

Can we make sure that we don't crosstalk? I want to respect everybody's opportunity. I'm going to return to the member.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's actually quite an honour to be heckled by the Minister of Tourism and Culture.

But the one thing about people who go to payday loan places is that, in many cases, they don't have a choice, and that's very sad. Later in my 10 minutes, I'll expand on that. But they don't have a choice because, quite frankly, they can't get a loan from the bank and they might not have the credit history, and that is a huge problem. We have to be very cognizant that they are a lender of last resort. We have to make sure that the trick to helping is to make sure that people don't have to go to a lender of last resort. They're popping up to fill a void. It's a void that we have to look beyond and see how we can fix the problems behind that, so they're not forced to go to a lender of last resort.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I thank the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for his comments.

I know that in my riding—in half of my riding, anyway—on almost every corner there's a “cash money/free cash” store. All over the place, they're popping up. They have been there for the last decade or so. That's the reality, I think, of Toronto and the reality of Ontario and the reality in my riding. There are two solitudes: There are people who are doing very well and they can't believe house prices—the average detached house is now going for \$1 million—and, meanwhile, there are people who can't really find enough money to pay for their food. That's why these payday loans have sort of popped up.

I think that the key is to try and get our banks and financial institutions to be more friendly to ordinary working people and not just to be catering to people with a lot of money, so they won't have to use these payday loans because it is expensive for them but they don't have any other choice. It would be wonderful to see that our banks made it reasonable for people to come and use the bank. But no; it is very difficult. And God help you if you get stuck in one of these credit rating agency circles where people of all different levels of education can never find out what these credit rating agencies really do and how they rate you. You can imagine a poor working

person who maybe doesn't speak English trying to deal with a credit rating agency. That's another thing we should try and maybe fix: these credit rating agencies which condemn you to a life of credit rating agency hell.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. My comments, the last time I spoke on this bill—it was amazing. I had a visit from a couple of people in the industry who came and wanted to assure me that it wasn't what I said it was. I'd have to dig my remarks up. I probably won't repeat them again today. Anyway, it was amazing what this individual had to tell me about how a lot of people who have good, well-paying jobs were coming. It's not just, as I laid out that day and as I feel, that it was people who were down and out and, as some of the members have said, are up against it, who are their best customers. I made some comments about the festive season, so I won't repeat those again. They might have been a little over the top. It was getting late in the day when I said it.

My biggest concern is when this individual gave me an outline of what they charge—I think it was \$21 on \$100 to cash a cheque—and I said, “Why would anybody do that?” I did a little more digging, and it turns out it's some people who maybe have obligations to, say, FRO—to spouses. Eventually they have to pay, but there are obligations to people they owe money to, so they're trying to circumvent for a while, because I don't think it happens forever. What I said, as the member from Eglinton–Lawrence said—and I feel this and I'll say it again—was that I think there's an obligation on the Canadian banks, which make good money—we see it every month, at every quarter, the kinds of dollars they're making—and the credit unions to step forward.

We're working on an initiative in my riding where ODSF and Ontario Works cheques will be cashed at the credit unions. We haven't gotten quite that far with the banks yet, but that's something that I intend to pursue.

I look forward to the rest of the day here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for his contributions to this debate on Bill 156.

I'd like to know, how did we get to this point that we are here as legislators regulating poverty and the charges that these payday loan institutions are allowed to impose on people who can't afford life? It's really kind of disturbing, to say the least. Why do people use payday loans? It's because they're at their lowest point financially and they're forced to go to these payday loan places and pay even more and be taken advantage of again financially. It really is disturbing that as a society we funnel people who live in poverty to payday loans that take advantage of them all over again financially. How does that make any sense? How did we get here today? We need to ask that question. We're legislating payday loans not to take advantage of people who can't afford life.

What I'd like to say about this situation is that we should find alternatives to payday loans, not regulate payday loans. Some of the alternatives are maybe the basic income that they're talking about federally and helping people that way. I recently read an article that post offices want to offer services for people who have government cheques. Apparently that was done years ago, and they're capable of doing that.

We need to find real alternatives that are going to help people, not continually prop up payday loans so that they can gouge people who have financial issues and problems and can't afford life.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return back to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

1710

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members for Timiskaming–Cochrane, Eglinton–Lawrence, Sarnia–Lambton and London–Fanshawe for responding to my remarks this afternoon.

I specifically want to address what was raised by my colleague the member for Sarnia–Lambton, who I think has made some very good points in this debate and reiterated the need for the chartered banks and Ontario credit unions to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the financial services they need—basic financial services. He mentioned cheque cashing.

I commend him for the leadership he has shown in his riding, trying to bring people together. We, as legislators, sometimes don't fully appreciate the authority we have, by virtue of our election. But one of our greatest powers, actually, is the power to convene, to bring people together, to get them discussing an issue and get them talking about solutions. That's exactly the kind leadership that the member for Sarnia–Lambton is showing on this issue. He obviously demonstrates his concern for the low-income people of his riding, as well as those who, perhaps for other reasons, struggle to make ends meet from month to month because of other challenges. The fact is that we can all take a lesson from that and see what we can do, working with the local financial institutions in our ridings.

I would hope that the large financial institutions—the chartered banks, the credit unions—are monitoring this debate as well. I think this represents a challenge to them, too, and perhaps an opportunity as well. They need to do what they can to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the kinds of financial services that many of us take for granted.

Again, this discussion continues, and I look forward to debate from other members this afternoon and as the bill continues through the legislative process.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: I appreciate this opportunity to get a few remarks on the record regarding Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services, commonly known, I think, as the payday loan act.

Some other members have concentrated on their part of the world and how this has affected their part of the world. In my few minutes, I'm going to concentrate on my riding and the ridings around it in northern Ontario. We don't have as many payday loan places as down here—I have some—and we also have a lot less population. Perhaps the reasons that people—many of the reasons are the same, but some are perhaps different than here.

Many of the people I know who have to go to these lenders of last resort aren't necessarily in the lowest income bracket. They're not middle class, but they're gainfully employed. They budget, they're conscious of their financial position, but they are subject to huge fluctuations.

In northern Ontario, when the price of gas goes up—it's already high, and it goes up by 10 or 15 cents. People in other parts of the province say, "Why do these people drive cars? Why don't they take the bus to work?" Well, there is no bus. "Why don't they take the train to work?" There is no train. They have no other choice but to drive a car. So they are very much impacted by fluctuations in the price of gas.

It would be something like in this area. I live here six months a year while the Legislature is running. No one is going to dispute that people in this area have challenges; no one is going to dispute that. Can you imagine the challenges that people here would face if the price of public transit went up and down 25% on a two-weekly basis. Can you imagine how upset people here would be? Could you imagine? That's what people in the north face on a regular basis.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: A point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): A point of order, the associate minister.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'd ask the member opposite to speak to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Hold the clock. I'm going to return to the member. I know the member is trying to stay on the bill. I return to the member.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, just for the record, I'm speaking wholly to the bill, because we are looking at regulating payday loans, and the reason behind why there is a payday loan industry is very pertinent to this bill. How can you talk about the payday loan industry if you're unwilling to talk about what's actually causing this industry to flourish? In my part of the world, escalating costs are causing a need, for some people, for this industry—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Hydro is another one of those costs.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and the fluctuating price of gas is one of those.

My colleague mentioned hydro. If you look over the long term, people in an area like mine, where we suffer from, at times, severe winter temperatures, and we have to heat our homes, as people do here—but the climatic conditions are much more severe. Again, this winter, we

didn't really have a cold winter, but last winter, we had a consecutive month of minus 30 to minus 40 at night. I heat with wood, and I even noticed the difference that we used in wood. That big of a difference could cause someone to be forced to look for an immediate—they need an immediate cash injection.

In my constituency office, we've helped people who couldn't pay their hydro bill. They're looking at their options, and it was cheaper to go to a payday loan place than it was to have to pay a reconnection charge for your hydro. Is that even understandable? Can you even fathom that?

The government might not want to hear the reasons why people have to go to payday loans in other parts of the province, but they're there.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: We know the reasons.

Mr. John Vanthof: They're there.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Talk to the bill.

Mr. John Vanthof: We are talking to the bill. We are talking to the bill.

One of the problems why the payday loan is coming across the province is that it's really difficult to go to the bank and say, "I need a loan to pay the extra cost for my heat." That's one of the reasons why they're there.

I would like to commend the members of the official opposition who have said something that we truly believe in, that the chartered banks and the credit unions should step up to the plate and have some kind of loan process where you actually can get a reasonable term loan that you're going to pay back for unforeseen—not calamities, not like your house burns down. But there are people who can't pay the heating bill, depending on how cold the weather is, through no fault of their own at all. I think that would be a big step. I really hope the chartered banks are listening, and the credit unions are listening. Some of them are taking initial steps, and I hope they take more steps.

The payday loan sector is there. We should regulate them more stringently. But they're there for a reason: because people can't get the money in other places,

Really, for the necessities of life in my part of the world—and I stick to and I talk about my part of the world because that's who I represent—people have to go to a payday loan place for the necessities of life, because of circumstances totally beyond their control, like the fluctuation in the price of gas.

If you're used to travelling from A to B with a bus service that we used to have—it's gone. Again, train service that we used to have—you used to be able to go to a medical appointment in Toronto with the train. You used to have a night train where you could go down, come back and do your medical appointment and not have to pay for hotel bills. We used to have that. That's gone.

1720

Now if you need a medical appointment—yes, you get \$100 or \$100 and change for a travel grant, but it's a lot different for families living here when they need to go for serious medical care. It's still a huge burden. For people

who live close to Toronto, it's a hop, skip and a jump in relation to the rest of the province. There are parts of the province that are much farther away than where I live. Again, if you have a medical emergency in your family—in the private members' bills we talked about medical conditions. Well, those medical conditions could drive people so that they need an immediate infusion of cash, which they might not get anywhere else but a payday loan. If you're facing something like that, do you know what? You're not going to sit down and figure out the interest, and that's truly tragic: that there is no other utility and no other method where those people can access funds other than through a payday loan and through 21 bucks on the hundred. That's truly scary.

Even with this bill, you have to make sure that you look at the whole province and look at what is behind what's driving people to pay way too much for far too little.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Once again, it's my pleasure to be able to stand and comment on what the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane said in his thoughtful commentary.

Bill 156 is very important for a number of reasons. I, for many years, questioned the need for these facilities as well, but in doing my own research and talking to organizations across Ontario who deal with vulnerable consumers, what they were so worried about was that, with the growth of online lending, which crosses jurisdictional boundaries, we can have people lending money to vulnerable consumers in Ontario who aren't even based in Canada, for example, and we can't control that. They were worried about driving business to loan sharks who do not provide a level of service that many of these places do, to put it lightly. Those were just a couple of their concerns around the outright banning of these types of facilities.

I can tell you what a couple of organizations said, because they speak to what I believe, but I'd rather have their quotes say it. The United Way said, "While we believe that many of these services"—these are the payday lenders and alternative financial services—"may be causing harm to individuals, families and even to communities, until there are viable alternatives, for example, through the traditional banking and credit union sector, our communities tell us that they offer a necessary lifeline to many people who have no other options."

I heard that time and again across Ontario. I've got a couple of other quotes, but I'll leave it there for now, other than, these organizations need to be controlled. We need to protect vulnerable consumers. Bill 156 takes a giant step in doing that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I want to commend the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his comments. I thought that that's why members came here and why they were elected from the ridings: to come to this honourable

place and be able to tell and relate stories from their ridings about their constituents. I think that's what the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane was doing. I think that's what a number of other members have done during this debate and some other debates.

I find it very objectionable for members of cabinet and parliamentary secretaries to continually rise and keep talking about people getting back to the debate. Talking about the bill is talking about people's experiences in their riding. That's what I was talking about. I'd like to know how many of the members on the other side actually have met with the people who run these payday loan organizations. I bet that probably none of them have been in the position themselves where they had to use one. That's another story.

I think the members should allow the debate to continue, and if the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane or if the member from another rural riding—

Mr. Bill Walker: Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Robert Bailey: —Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound wants to stand—and it's his time, that 10 minutes, if they want to elaborate on issues in their riding that are affecting their constituents and relate those stories. The transportation issue is a great big issue. There's no subway, there's no transit, in Timiskaming–Cochrane. There isn't any in Sarnia–Lambton either, or Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, which people can access if they do have medical appointments. There are people who would have to use these payday loans, and like I said, the onus, I think—if there's something the cabinet could do, and the parliamentary secretaries—they could call in the leaders of the major banks, the lending institutions, the credit unions, bring them in—you're always great at advocacy and conversation—and have that conversation—

Mr. Bill Walker: Tell them to bring their chequebooks with them.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Bring their chequebooks with them, and let's get this thing straightened out.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to weigh in on my colleague's presentation on Bill 156. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, as always, has presented a whole bunch of new information that I'm learning for the first time. I think that that is, as we've just heard, part of the magic of this place. We have the opportunity to learn from each other, and we're not just learning from each other; we're learning about each other's constituencies; we're learning about each other's communities. For the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to say, "Get back to it and speak to the bill," to stay on the issues—we are. We do bring voice to our communities, and I would say that that should be welcomed. This is a government that loves to shut down debate with time allocation, but I didn't know they got to dictate what it was we talked about.

Something that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane had pointed out is that for those who use these services, whether it's payday loans or some of these

different alternative services, they have no other options. That seems to be a theme. Every time we have the opportunity to hear about what it's like living up north, we learn that there are fewer options up there. When we're talking about the cost of gas or access to health care, transit, the cost of living, hydro—and maybe the cost of electricity isn't more up north, but they use it for different things. When we talk about agricultural industries, there's far more—it does cost more, but they use it for more.

When you add all of that together and you look at just how hard-pressed our northern communities, our rural communities are to make ends meet, I don't know how they remain hopeful in a Liberal province. Maybe they would be able to come and present at committee, except that, as we've already heard and been reminded, they can't just hop on the train and come and present at committee, because they don't have those options.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to add my voice to this bill and to speak about my riding as well. More and more payday lenders are opening their doors in my riding. As the MPP from Eglinton–Lawrence pointed out earlier, they concentrate in particular neighbourhoods where the most disadvantaged people live, to the point that my local councillor, Frances Nunziata, recently presented a motion at city council that passed unanimously, tasking city staff with developing a bylaw and different options around minimum distances for predatory lending. We've also been working closely with ACORN, who hosted a fair banking forum in my riding.

I agree with the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane that other financial institutions should really step up. I do know that credit unions want to play a role and step in and offer some alternatives, but it would be great to get the banks, which I believe are under federal jurisdiction—I don't think we have too much control over them, but certainly we should try.

1730

I know that the Canadian postal workers, as well, are proposing the comeback of postal banking; that's very popular in other countries. We should look at all the different alternatives to make sure that we protect the consumers as much as possible.

That's what this bill intends to do in its own way. By making sure that people know their rights and that they know exactly what they are getting into—a lot of people, as you mentioned—I'm referring to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—don't at times know exactly what dealing with a payday lender entails.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return back to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane to wrap up.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members who responded to my comments and who actually responded to my comments. It's refreshing. I'd really like to thank everybody who did that.

What I focused on was the bill, but to truly look at this problem you have to focus on also what's causing the people to go to payday loans. And yes, the banks and the credit unions—specifically the credit unions—are looking for ways to try and alleviate this, to try and fit a business model to help these people.

I'm going to close with another issue. It has been announced that the price of gas is going to go up five-point-something cents as part of the climate change initiative. It's a problem, but people in Ontario want to pay their part. But again, people in the north should also be part of the offset. When the government announced \$100 million for climatic retrofits to make your house more efficient, and it was done through Union Gas and Enbridge, I spoke in this House to say, "That takes out a lot of people who use propane." I was challenged by the President of the Treasury Board that, "No, no, everyone is accessible." I talked to the people who sell propane and oil in my riding, and no. So far, they don't have any access. Do you know how big a difference it would make for the climate, for carbon, if we could take oil furnaces out of people's houses and change them to propane? It would make a huge difference. But again, people in remote and rural—because where I live isn't remote—have been forgotten or left out because this program, as far as I can see, is only for gas customers. It would make a huge difference.

The government has got to look at other things to keep people out of the payday loan system.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak about this bill on payday loans—I believe it's Bill 156. I have it marked here. Hang on one second. It is. How's that for memory at the end of the day? Why doesn't it say it clearly here? It is an act that amends the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act and Payday Loans Act.

We held a very interesting meeting in our caucus boardroom with some of the investors and owners of payday loan establishments. It is unfortunate when you hear that people have to get a loan of any kind for a family emergency, whether it's at a bank or whether it's from a payday loan agency or from a credit union. The key difference is that, most often, banks and trust companies are dealing with people who are getting loans based on equity and using that for collateral. They're getting loans—it's almost like an investment when they get those loans, because they're using their equity—maybe the equity from their home or property that they own—to get some cash flow so that sometimes they can do improvements, which can be an investment, or invest in a business.

This is a big stretch from that. This is the opposite end of the spectrum. People who have to avail themselves of payday loan establishments are people who don't have equity to take to a bank. They don't have a rainy day fund, and they are stressed. I think that we have to look at the broad picture and realize how this type of stress that

people are living under day to day, wondering, when they open each bill—they're afraid to open their bills. They avoid opening their bills, which sometimes makes it even worse because then there are interest payments or reactivation fees. They're living under such incredible stress that it makes people turn to abuse of alcohol or drugs; it can make people violent; it can affect their children and other family members; it can affect their job performance at work; and it can affect their health as well.

It is very important for us to make sure that people are able to access what I call microloans. That's what these are. These are microloans. They're small loans that are only meant to be for two weeks. They're meant for family or personal emergencies.

As we are hearing from some of the members from rural ridings, people rely on their cars in those rural ridings. They have no other choice. You cannot walk to a store to buy a few groceries for your children if you are in those kinds of communities. So if their car has an unexpected flat tire, a lot of times you can imagine how stressful that is. They are well aware that some construction project is going on near them and when they get a nail in their tire they probably, rightly so, blame that construction project for their bad luck and now, all of a sudden, they need to get two tires for their vehicle.

We want people to be able to have that financial literacy, I would call it, and to understand how important it is to save in good times so that hopefully you don't need to rely on some kind of microloan or a payday loan situation.

We can't talk the talk unless we walk the walk. We are borrowing, in the province of Ontario, over \$11 billion a year to pay interest on our debt. I wish it was laughable. I wish I could laugh and say it was funny that we are hearing from members in the Legislature and members in our communities who somehow look down on people who borrow to make ends meet. We're doing the exact same thing.

I'm not blaming just this government. Other governments across Canada, across the world—municipalities are in debt. I'm in York region and I think the debt now has passed over \$3 billion. Maybe the member from Newmarket–Aurora can vouch for me. The York region administration is in debt. Many of the cities in York region are in debt. That means that the individuals in those cities are in debt and living in a really scary situation, for people who sit down and think of it. Unfortunately, most people don't take the time to think of it. Collectively, as a society, we all owe on those debts.

I remember during my last campaign a very clever guy—I can still picture him. He said he was in a rented house. He was an electrician. His name was Mike. It sort of reminds me of when Obama campaigned and there was Joe the Plumber or somebody who went around. We wondered if that was a set-up, but this is a true story. I spoke to him about government debt and the reason why I'm a financial conservative. I consider myself a fairly progressive Conservative but I am financially conserva-

tive and that debt bothers me. It's something I've always thought about: governments and debt.

He said to me, "Well, I don't own my house. I'll just move to Alberta," because at that time, things were still pretty good in Alberta and he figured he'd just pack up his family and get in his truck—he's an electrician—and he could get a job in Alberta. He was probably thinking about it at the time. Maybe his wife didn't want to move and maybe that was a struggle they were going through at that time.

But that's the mentality. People don't have equity. They don't own their house. They don't own their business. All they own are their skills and they own the shirt on their back and maybe their equipment, if they're an electrician. But people don't have that equity and it makes them very transferable. We see people who will move to another province because there's a better program for some kind of social services or disability.

This morning during question period, we heard somebody speak about autism therapy; that they are concerned autism therapy will not be available for their child and they will look at other provinces and consider moving to other provinces.

So if our debt is starting to affect the level of services, which I believe it is already, many people might have to consider moving to another province. That's a problem, Madam Speaker. That's not fair to Manitoba, who might be managing their books very well, to have all the families with autism or certain health problems all of a sudden move to their province. That means that we as legislators are not doing our job here at Queen's Park.

1740

So the people who go to payday loans are at a very low point. I think that they need to have access to payday loan institutions. I'm not speaking against the loan institutions; I'm speaking against people being forced to live hand to mouth, often even with a good-paying job. If their electricity rates are sky-rocketing, if they're having to pay for autism therapy for their child—I would wonder how many people are in debt in the province of Ontario because they're having to access services that, really, the government should be providing, but they're on a wait-list. I'd say, kudos, to those people who are willing to use their home equity and to invest in their children and to invest in their own health and to ensure that they are not going to be left behind.

I think that it really comes down—and we've heard a lot of people speak about it—to education: financial literacy and financial education. I have to say, I still remember being in about grade 10. We had home economics for a couple of months, and different types of courses like that that many of the high schools don't have any more. In one of the courses, we had to learn how to write a cheque, which I had not done until then; we had to learn how to reconcile our bank statement; and we learned about credit cards, interest, compounded interest and what it all meant. I actually found it very interesting at the time.

I remember, I did very well in the exam, except I lost marks because I didn't spell "cheque" with Q-U-E; I

spelled it C-K. To this day, I have to tell people here that whenever I see somebody write the word “check” when they mean “to write a cheque to the bank” with a C-K, I’m outraged, because I say, “I lost marks for that, and you should lose marks for that as well.”

I think that all of us here understand what compounded interest is. We understand that payday loans are meant as microloans for two weeks, without compounded interest. Yes, it might sound like a very small amount—\$21 on \$100—but that’s 21%. I think that that sort of financial literacy—it’s our job to ensure that the schools are teaching it. But we also understand that there are many people who are intellectually challenged in our community, or who may be developing dementia and their family members and friends don’t even realize it yet. They’re taking out loans that really they shouldn’t be. That’s a big challenge for us here in the province, because you want people to have their privacy and autonomy, but then there can be problems associated with that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’m glad to rise again and add further comments on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

To make comments in response to the member from Thornhill, who tied many pieces into this issue—you know, we’re talking about alternative financial services, but it isn’t just those services; it’s who needs to use them, who feels that they have no choice but to use them, from all across the communities. Earlier I was commenting on the member who has spoken about northern communities and what payday loans and these facilities are like there. But really, through our communities, we have stories that we need to be recognizing.

I’m reminded of something I talked about the other day. We had a group that put on an Amazing Race to the Bottom, which was an obstacle course in my constituency office parking lot. It sort of—it didn’t make light of it, but was a clever approach to point out that people had to juggle child care and race to pay the rent and carry the weight of the necessities of life. It was an obstacle course that pointed out and highlighted the different challenges that people face. I’m thinking now that we missed an obstacle in this: when there is no money, when it isn’t just an obstacle to overcome, when you have hit a wall and there is nowhere to go. When you cannot climb that wall and you cannot go around it, what on earth do you do?

The fact that so many people are forced into these establishments, forced to use a loan shark, forced to put themselves in this cycle—to the member’s point, she was talking about microloans and that idea that it’s intended to be short-term, to get you from one paycheque to the next or from one obstacle to the next. But really, we see that it is a cycle people can’t get out of.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It’s of course a duty and a privilege to rise to speak on Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015.

I’ll just share with you perhaps a small incident in which I think folks who use payday loans—like my own children, who are studying the mathematics of compound interest—one day wake up and see their negative power. One of the things that we perhaps don’t really realize is that the individuals who are forced to use these loans—which, yes, have been called “micro,” but tend to become macro and chronic in duration, long-term. Therein lie the challenge, the difficulty and the trials and tribulations, because what should be a two-week, four-week or six-week endeavour alone, as you know, Speaker, cycles upon itself, and then—as my kids realized one fine day, “Daddy, this is what compound interest does”—there is therefore interest on interest. That’s where the debt trap occurs, as has been mentioned.

It’s in order to regulate that, in order to make sure that the interest rates that are charged, whether hidden, explicit or annualized, are more in conformity with what official or proper financial practices are, as well as, for example, instituting things like grace periods for collections and in general helping individuals who, yes, may legitimately require these types of bridge financing or bridge loans—I think probably we might want to call it that, as opposed to microloans. “Microloans” has a different connotation being used globally, by the way, in other parts of the world, as Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus will tell you.

In any case, this is an important issue. We cannot outright ban it; it’s still a valid need to be serving in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I’m just going to borrow a little bit of the comments just made by the member from Etobicoke North, talking a lot about interest. I really hope that at the end of the day all of his colleagues will start thinking more about interest, because every day that I stand in this House, I talk about the \$11 billion in interest that that government spends on just their debt.

You can relate it back to this bill, where there is a need for lending services—short-term, in this case. You’re hopeful that people only need this in short-term bursts; it’s only intended for a two-week period. However, the model that this government is setting is encouraging people to borrow and borrow, as they are. They are addicted to overspending, and that’s making it tougher for other people.

Energy rates have quadrupled, and people are now having to struggle to truly pay their bills. A lot of people in our rural ridings, as a number of folks here have said today, are really struggling with what bill they pay and where they juggle the cash. They don’t have unending amounts of money in the bank. Some people—many people—are living paycheque to paycheque. When these rates go up—we just had another hydro rate increase on May 1, Madam Speaker. It’s getting more and more difficult for a lot of people out there to live, so they need access to these types of services, and they need them when they can.

I'm hopeful that this government will really step back. If they're intent on putting this type of legislation through, maybe they should look in the mirror a little bit and say, "Should we be continuing to borrow beyond our means? Should we be putting those pages sitting in front of you in a precarious position where they're perhaps never going to get out of debt?" Every single child in this province is born into \$21,000 of debt the day they enter our great province.

Debt is a big thing. Understanding debt and understanding how to manage it, as the member said, is very critical. But I hope this government actually takes some education as well so that we can get out of this debt spiral that they continue to follow down.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House, particularly after the member from Thornhill, to offer a few comments on her wise exposition of the situation in Ontario, which is pretty horrendous in terms of debt load; no question about that.

It's interesting because, while she was speaking, I was googling—you know, that great research opportunity we all have. Just in terms of financial literacy and the situation of Canadians, our personal debt has grown by about 64% over the last decade that now the average Canadian owes 163% of their disposable income. We're all in debt in a way that our parent's generation would have been horrified by.

1750

One can only imagine, with interest rates as low as they are right now, what happens if the inevitable happens and they come up a little bit. I always look at all those young people buying condos—those few who could afford it, because in downtown Toronto it's very difficult for anybody to buy anything anymore. But if the interest rates go up, and you think of all those young people who have invested and won't be able to keep up with their payments, particularly as jobs flow from this province—she went over that in, I think, pretty interesting detail.

I'll just come back to my main point. Yes, I don't have a problem with microloans. I think that we need more microloans. What we have a problem with is the interest rate charged at 550% and the fact that, even with this bill, that situation remains. Let's hope that the government, in their consultations, especially with groups like ACORN, finally does something about the elephant in the room, which is the actual interest rate charged by payday lenders, which, as I said, should be illegal.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return back to the member from Thornhill to wrap up.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that it's often very scary for people to talk about money. People don't like to talk with their relatives or their friends. People don't really know sometimes, and they're shocked when a relative passes away who they thought was living fairly comfortably; then they find out that actually, even once they

even sell whatever property they have, there's still money owing.

Microloans: The member from Etobicoke North is correct that there is a global term, which is that you help in Third World countries particularly, and often it had great success with women. They were given microloans—just a few hundred dollars, enough to buy, say, a loom or a sewing machine or something like that—and they were able to get their family out of just absolute dire poverty and start a business. Unfortunately, with the debt we are paying and the compounded interest on the debt that we have here, I hope that Ontario is not heading to a point where we have to be asking other countries for microloans to help us out.

It would be nice if there was a way for people to access money when they need it. I think that the payday loan places have a huge, huge percentage of default. I don't think that it's enough to just say, "Well, they're mean business people and they're charging these exorbitantly high interest rates." The fact is that there is a reason why people go to payday loans. It's because they can't get a loan at a bank. We all recognize that. And why can't they? Because the level of default is so enormous.

That's their business model: "We are going to lend everybody \$200. We're going to expect that half of the people don't pay it back, and the other half pay back the capital and the interest on the other ones who never paid it back." That might be a fair business model, it might be a legal business model, but it doesn't sound like a great way to have our society function and carry forward. It would be nice if people were better educated and understood what they were getting themselves into, and were able to pay off that loan quickly and get back on their feet.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad that I'm here this evening to contribute to this debate because it is a very important issue. It's a very important issue because it talks about poverty.

We pointed out that not everyone who takes out payday loans is living in poverty. There are people who have jobs, but due to unforeseen circumstances—maybe they were laid off; maybe their spouse lost their job because the company moved out of Ontario and closed its doors. Then how do they make that next month's rent? They are forced to make decisions that maybe they wouldn't have done under those circumstances, and they go to payday loans.

These payday loans are popping up everywhere—they are. And usually they're popping up beside pawn shops, because a lot of people, when they are under economic strain in their household, will take their personal possessions and go to a pawn shop. That's another avenue of resources when people are desperate because they've taken some kind of hit or they can't make ends meet from the income that they have every month.

This government had the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Ontarians. who are having hard times making ends meet. I know that our critic from Bramalea–Gore–Malton had given some suggestions back in December 2014, when they were in committee. He's the NDP's government and consumer services critic and our deputy leader. He gave this government some very intelligent recommendations to be added to this bill, which would actually make a difference to people who are using payday loans—an effective way to make this bill work for people who use these payday loans. If they're going to continue to exist, then I think we need to make it reasonable for people to access these loans.

This week, we had a member from the Liberal Party introduce a bill to stop door-to-door sales. Why was that? We know why. Because people get into precarious situations, where someone comes to your door, they want you to sign this contract and you're being taken advantage of financially. This is what happens when people approach payday loans. They're being taken advantage of financially.

Yes, now there is a requirement in this bill to have these payday loan institutions explain the terms of the contract, but it's sometimes difficult to understand the complications of finance when you are so desperate that you've come to these agencies.

Back to the recommendations that the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton made that were very reasonable and could actually help consumers when they have to access these payday loans: Cap lending fees to \$15 per \$100. Can you imagine having to cap \$15 per \$100? That's 15% interest. That's supposed to be a reasonable recommendation. What is the interest on these \$100 loans now?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's 550%.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member from Parkdale–High Park says it's 550%. That is incredible.

Even that suggestion wasn't considered. That's incredible to me.

The next recommendation he suggested was extending the grace period that consumers have to pay back their loans without penalty. The grace period was addressed in the bill, so that's something. I believe I read somewhere that the grace period has been extended to 62 days.

The other important recommendation was to create a database to enforce the ban on rollover loans. A database to track those rollover loans seems very reasonable, because it's compounded and people get into this cycle, as we talked about. Really, it's a cyclone that just drags them right down into an endless financial rabbit hole.

The last recommendation that was suggested was to ensure that the government works with financial institutions to provide alternative services, like credit unions and postal banking—I mentioned that before, and another member mentioned it as well—in low-income communities. The Conservatives are talking about this recommendation. So both parties on this side of the House agree that we need to find alternatives to payday loans. It's not just payday loans that we need to have access to when consumers find themselves financially strapped.

I'll let you stand, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing as it's 6 o'clock, I am going to adjourn the House until Monday, May 9, at 10:30.

The House adjourned at 1759.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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